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OLIVE LOOKED UP, AND WITH A START, THEIR EYES MET.

THE RICH MISS SMITH.

[A NOVELETTE.]

PROLOGUE.

If ever money was not appreciated in this lower world, it was the fortune which Cornelius Jenkins, merchant of the City of London, took into his head to leave to the third daughter of his managing clerk, Thomas Smith, and if ever girl honestly regretted being an heiress it was poor little Olive, the plain one in a very good-looking family, and the middle sister of five girls, whom their parents made the best of, though they would far rather have had sons than daughters.

Thomas Smith was earning four hundred a year. He and his wife had no extravagant tastes, they had married on thirty shillings a week, and thought themselves rich when they got to two hundred a year.

Mrs. Smith was a pleasant, motherly woman, more interested in her housekeeping than in

the fate of nations, while the managing clerk had his horizon solely bounded by the "firm," which he believed to be the greatest and most important in London.

He had served Mr. Jenkins for over a dozen years, and had never expected to be remembered in his will, so was as much surprised as anyone else at the legacy bequeathed to his daughter.

Cornelius Jenkins was a bachelor. He had never had mother or sister. He lived to be seventy, and so it came about that the nearest relations he left behind him were cousins. One was in the business as junior partner, and felt tolerably certain of the lion's share of his kinsman's wealth.

It happened on one occasion when this cousin was taking a holiday, Mr. Jenkins wanted some information about a matter of business and called, actually called, on his managing clerk after business hours on a Saturday afternoon.

Tom Smith, his wife, and their two elder children were out. The great man was received by Olive, then a bright child of ten. She had not the faintest idea of the visitor's identity, but her hospitable instincts made her detain him till her parents returned, while for his amusement

she conducted him round the very small suburban garden, and gave him the only flower on her little rose tree.

Mr. Smith's amazement at his employer's presence may be imagined, it only increased when Mr. Jenkins asked for a cup of tea. He talked to Olive during the meal, rather snubbing the two elder girls, who, as usual, were trying to "put down" their junior, and when he went away he left a bright half sovereign in Olive's little hand.

She never saw him again. Just three years later Mr. Jenkins died, and Tom Smith, to his utter amazement, was bidden to the funeral.

"He must have left you a small legacy, Tom," said his better half; "well I won't deny it may come in useful, for the children cost more every year."

Mr. Smith began to entertain hopes of the legacy when Sampson Jenkins, the junior partner, received him with a hearty hand-shake, and introduced him to his wife. The Sampson Jenkinses were kind-hearted people, and so long as they were not forgotten they did not grudge others a slice of good fortune.

"It will be a great surprise to you, I expect,"

said Sampson cheerfully, "at least I know it was to me when my cousin told me."

The will was very short, and but few names were mentioned in it. Mr. Jenkins left his business to his cousin Sampson, with a request that he would retain Thomas Smith as managing clerk while he continued to fulfil his duties conscientiously. The house at Redhill with its furniture, plate, and contents of all description, was left to Mrs. Sampson, who was a great favourite of the old man, and the will went on that, having now provided amply for those nearest to him, the testator wished to benefit the only stranger who had ever shown him a disinterested act of kindness. He, therefore, bequeathed to Olive Smith, third daughter of the before named Thomas Smith, the sum of fifty thousand pounds, to be held by two trustees in trust for her according to the conditions hereafter set forth.

Thomas Smith gasped. Fifty thousand pounds to a child of thirteen! Why at three per cent. (and even the funds gave that) it would mean fifteen hundred a year, nearly four times his whole income. How delighted his wife would be. They could take a house in the country, and have a governess for the girls, and they could—but everyone except himself and Mr. Ross had left, and Mr. Sampson's voice recalled the managing clerk from these bright day-dreams.

"I think while my cousin's lawyer is here we had better inform you of the conditions of the bequest. He is the second trustee."

Alas! the conditions were not such as would promote peace and love in the ten-roomed house at Brixton. In the jealous desire that no one should wrong his little favourite of her fortune, Cornelius Jenkins had hedged the legacy round with so many precautions it really seemed as though he thought Olive's relations her bitter enemies, and wanted to protect her from them at any cost.

His cousin Sampson and his lawyer, Henry Ross, were the trustees. They were to keep the money in the funds, and allow any sum not exceeding three hundred a year for Olive's education until she reached the age of eighteen, after which they were to pay a larger amount for her, if they could find a home for her in any family likely to take her into good society. She was to spend her vacations with her parents, but no payment was provided for this, and the trust specially directed that she was not to have the power to alienate any portion of the legacy in favour of her sisters or any other relation, the old merchant, thinking that the balance of the interest accumulating with the principal would produce sixty thousand pounds when she came of age.

Even then she had no power over the principal, which was to descend to her children after her; but in the event of her marriage ten thousand pounds might be invested in house property.

If she died childless, the whole legacy reverted to Sampson Jenkins or his heirs.

"But I hope she won't die," said that gentleman, heartily. "There's a fine fortune in store for her, and I trust she'll live to enjoy it. Why, Smith, how grave you look, my wife and I thought you'd be delighted at such a provision for your child."

But Thomas Smith's face looked more as though he had lost a fortune than gained one.

"Am I bound to take it, sir?" he asked Mr. Sampson. "Couldn't I refuse it in Olive's name?"

Mr. Ross interposed.

"You could refuse for her to benefit by it, while she was under your control, but you could not prevent the fortune coming to her when she is twenty-one, and surely it is better for your child to be educated according to her future prospects!"

Mrs. Sampson Jenkins interposed. She and her husband were staying at Red Hill (indeed, the place was their own now). She was a kind, motherly woman, and she understood Mr. Smith's feelings.

"I think you are sorry there should be such a difference made between your children. My husband told Mr. Jenkins he thought the will might lead to strife."

"He wouldn't hear of altering it," put in

Sampson. "The fact is my cousin was a man of strong prejudices. He only saw your children once, and just as decided as he liked Olive, he seems to have disliked her sisters. I really don't see what you are to do. If you refuse this fortune now it must come to the girl eight years hence, and—forgive me—your income is not a large one with which to provide for the future of your wife and five girls. Surely it would be a comfort to know one was off your mind."

"Thank you," the poor man looked very grave. "Don't think me ungrateful, sir. I know Mr. Jenkins meant kindly, but—"

"You'll feel better when you're used to the idea," said the lawyer, kindly. "You know you'll not lose the child altogether. All her nowadays (and precious long ones schools give now) she'll spend with you."

"That's the worst of it," said Tom, with a groan. "She's to be a fine lady three-fourths of her time, and come back on us the other."

He was not a gentleman, and he knew nothing of society and its code, but he had a good deal of common-sense, and for Olive to spend her school time among luxurious surroundings, and then come home to the eight-roomed house where the one maid did all the washing and his wife lent a hand with the ironing—why it seemed to him not to fit.

He left Red Hill about seven, and trains not fitting remarkably well it was after nine when he reached the quiet, suburban house in North Brixton. Olive was in bed, of course; but to his dismay his eldest girl was sitting up to keep her mother company and to hear the news.

"Suey's just my right hand, father," said Mrs. Smith affectionately, as Tom sat down to supper. "and she's getting quite a woman, so I promised her as a treat she should sit up and hear all about the funeral, and how much poor Mr. Jenkins left you."

Tom divided the stew into three equal portions. He did not grudge Suey her share of his supper; but oh, how he wished her in bed. He loved his first-born dearly, but he was quite aware of her faults. Suey was of a "managing" disposition, and never got on with Olive, whom she tried hard to keep in order, and treat as a "little one," though there were only three years between them. In any case his wife would have resented the bequest to Olive, but if he had to tell her of it before Suey, it would be far worse.

Susan Smith was a pretty girl with flaxen hair and blue eyes, thoroughly domesticated, as advertisements say, but with no more sympathy for anything beyond her understanding than if she had been heartless. Olive loved books and hated sewing; her clothes never by any chance, lasted so long as her sisters'. She was not half so much use in the house as the twins, and therefore Susan denounced her as careless, untidy and troublesome.

"Well," said Mrs. Smith, cheerfully, "how much is it, Tom; don't keep us in suspense. You need not be afraid of Suey, she can keep a secret."

"If it's twenty pounds, pa, we might afford a new carpet for the drawing-room," said Suey, briskly, "that one's dreadfully shabby."

"Tom," cried his wife, really alarmed, "you don't mean to say he's left you nothing. Why, it was a shame to drag you all that way if there wasn't a legacy."

"My dear, there's ten pounds. Mr. Jenkins left ten pounds to everyone who had been in the firm over five years, and half as much to those who had been twelve months in his employ. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, but I forgot it."

"You must be ill, Tom. Ten pounds is not as much as you ought to have, still it's worth remembering. What is the matter, my dear, you can't mean you'll lose your situation?"

"No, Emily, there's a request in the will to Mr. Sampson to keep me on, and he's very kind. Couldn't have been kinder."

Mr. Smith was not a very acute person, but at last she perceived she should get no more out of her husband till they were alone, so she told Suey it was getting late, and hustled that damsel of bed. Then when the little maid had carried away the supper things, the wife produced the

tobacco jar, and her husband's pipe, tolerably certain his favourite solace would open Tom's heart. And it did. He had not taken many whiffs, before he said, gravely,

"I've got some bad news, Emily."

"Queen Anne's dead!" retorted Mrs. Smith. "Why, Tom, I've known something was the matter ever since I set eyes on you; just tell me what it is and don't fret, we shall manage to get over the trouble somehow."

So Mr. Smith unburdened himself; Emily said nothing, she waited in breathless silence till he had finished, then she broke out.

"The old man must have been mad."

"No, I remember at the time he seemed very much taken with Olive. Mrs. Sampson says he was once engaged to a lady named Olive, and that he never got over her death."

"Aren't they indignant?"

"The Sampsons? No, they have only one child, a boy, and with the business and the house he'll be as well off as they care for. Emily, I knew you would take this hardly, but I can't help it."

"If it had only been any of the others—but, Olive! Why, Tom, you know Olive is the least attractive, the least deserving of the five. Why should she be put over the head of Suzy, who's just the best girl in Brixton, or poor ailing Patty, or my pretty twins?"

Tom drummed on the table with his fingers.

"We can refuse to let Olive touch the money while she is under our control," he said at last slowly.

"And rob her sisters by spending your hard-earned money on her," said Mrs. Smith indignantly. "Not if I know it; she's got the fortune and all she needs shall come out of it. She has wronged the others enough already."

Tom could not quite see how, but he loved his wife too well to argue with her when she was so much put out.

"Shall you tell them—Olive and the rest?"

"When can she go to school," demanded Mrs. Smith; "if she's to have three-thirds of your salary spent on her education, it's time she began. Who chooses the school?"

"The trustees; Mrs. Sampson Jenkins knows of a very good one at Eastbourne where some nieces of her own are being educated. She proposed Olive should go to her on a visit and make their acquaintance, you know the holidays will soon be over."

"You had better write to Mrs. Jenkins and ask her when she would like Olive to go."

"But you'll want some time to get her ready, wife. Why, when Suey went to stay with my mother years ago, you took a fortnight over her things."

"That was different; I wanted Suey to look nice, but I wash my hands of Olive, I shall never set another stitch for her; she has money enough to pay for all she wants."

Thomas Smith was thankful to remember Mr. Jenkins had assured him there would be no delay in Olive's going to school; if the interest of the legacy could not be appropriated at once, he would be responsible for all expenses, and his wife had kindly offered to take Olive to Mrs. Seymour's establishment when she took her own two orphan nieces; it was as well for poor Olive that, instead of resenting their kinsman's strange bequest, the Sampson Jenkinses seem disposed to be kind to the poor little heiress. Certainly she was not likely to meet with much kindness in her own home.

Mrs. Smith rose and began to take the unburnt knobs of coal off the fire, a sure sign she thought it was bed time; her face was hard and strained. Tom would rather have seen her crying.

"It's not my fault, Emily," he said gently. "I'll work harder than ever for the others to make up. They should all be rich, poor girls, if I could manage it."

Mrs. Smith kissed him; she was not angry with her husband, all her resentment was reserved for Olive.

"It's not your doing, Tom, but my heart's sore about it; you mustn't mind my being a bit down-to-night; I'll pull myself together in the morning."

"And the children?" asked Mr. Smith, for the second time, "shall you tell them?"

"Yes—I see no good in making secrets and mysteries."

It happened after breakfast; it was a Sunday morning, so Mr. Smith had no reason to hurry away, they were all gathered in the front parlour, Susy bright and fresh looking, a little inclined to resent only being told the news with the children instead of being trusted with it before. Patty, the sickly one of the family, nestling up against her father, the twins open-eyed in wonder as to what would happen next, and Olive quite unconscious of any wrongdoing of her own, and yet with an uneasy feeling she was in disgrace.

It was a cold, bleak January day, the five girls were dressed in warm useful serge frocks, Susy's with a little extra trimming as was but fair, and the twins brightened up with white pinafores which set off their fair skins and rosy faces.

Mr. Smith looked round his family and wondered for perhaps the hundredth time, how he came to have such a child as Olive. She was the only dark one of the five sisters; her complexion was sallow, and what one would call "muddy," her black hair was always a trial to her mother's neatness, since no persuasion would make it lie smooth. It was worse than usual this morning, nothing in the world but a tangled maze of rough curls. Her eyes might have redeemed her from the charge of plainness, only, poor child, she had got into such a state of continual fear that she seldom lifted them from the ground. Olive had been snubbed from babyhood, she was the most sensitive of the little Smiths, she was the most constantly reproved, and now, poor child, she had grown so used to this state of things as to expect nothing else.

"You had better tell them, Tom," said Mrs. Smith to her husband, who looked as if he did not like the task.

"My dears," he began awkwardly, "I want you to know that very soon Olive is going away, she will go to school and only come home at holiday times."

"Shall I learn music, father?" breathed Olive, eagerly, "and when am I going?"

"Heartless child!" struck in Mrs. Smith, "you'll go just as soon as the people will have you; and mark my words, this money will do you no good. You ought not to have it."

She flounced out of the room, and her husband contrived to make things a little clearer to the girls, telling them old Mr. Jenkins had a perfect right to do what he chose with his money.

"And Olive will be an heiress?" cried Susy. "It doesn't seem fair when I am the oldest."

"I'll give all the money to father," said poor Olive, anxiously; "I don't want it."

"My little girl, you'll have to keep it," said her father, gravely. "I can't say I'm pleased there should be such a difference between you and your sister; but my old friend meant kindly, and it can't be helped now."

Three days later Olive went to Red Hill, and when kind Mrs. Jenkins met her at the station her motherly heart ached for the lonely child.

Olive was dressed in her very oldest clothes (her mother having seized on the others for the benefit of the twins). She had cried till her eyes were red, and her cheeks hopelessly tear-stained.

There was about the poor little creature such a forlorn, neglected air that Alice Jenkins felt thankful she had the chance of making her look a little more like other girls before she handed her over to Mrs. Seymour's very fashionable care.

CHAPTER I.

"I HATE the very idea of it. Mother, it seems terrible that relations of ours should do such a thing!"

The speaker was a tall slender girl, dressed in a summer muslin. A basket of roses in one hand, and a garden hat hanging on the other arm, showing she had only just come in through the open French window.

The lady addressed—an older likeness of the girl, and a comely woman still, though a few silver threads streaked her soft hair—smiled indulgently at her daughter.

"I'm afraid, Nell, we can't prevent it. Your Aunt Mary has a perfect right to add to her income in any way she pleases."

"But to take a boarder! Actually to take a girl of eighteen, who is avowedly so disagreeable her own family can't get on with her! Fancy saddling one's self with such an incubus!"

"We have no right to interfere, Nell," said Lady Maude Cheviot, gravely; "it is not our business."

"But it is. You know, mother, Aunt Mary never takes hints. She *will* come up here whenever she feels inclined and stay for hours. She drags that poor Lotty, and that odious Max here in her train, and there's not the least doubt she will bring Miss Smith too. It's perfectly horrible to contemplate."

Lady Maude sighed.

She had loved her husband dearly, and seldom questioned any act of his; but there were times when she bitterly regretted that Sir Edward had left the use of Lindenhurst to his widowed sister, Mrs. Stuart, for her life.

The Cheviots were rich, and their estate large; besides the Court and the Dower-house it boasted a comfortable ivy-covered residence, standing in a pleasant garden.

This had usually been let to some agreeable neighbour; but Sir Edward had left the use of it to his sister for life; and as he died only six months after Mrs. Stuart had taken up her abode there, he could not foresee the drawbacks her presence would be to his own family.

Sir Norman, the new Baronet, was many years older than his half-sister Nell. As he was on the most affectionate terms with his stepmother he prevailed on Lady Maude to remain with him in the home of all her married life.

She was rich enough to need nothing at his hands; but she and Nell were very fond of Norman, and the three would have been a most cosy family party but for the neighbourhood of Mrs. Stuart, who proved a veritable thorn in the flesh to them all.

By birth a Cheviot, she always fancied she must be nearer to Norman than his stepmother, and by the same right considered she ought to be included in every party given at the Court, and be welcomed there at any time or season she might call.

She was poor for her position, that is, she had five hundred a year; and she had brought up her son to no profession.

Max called himself an artist; but no one had ever seen a picture from his brush. He was often hanging about Lindenhurst leading an idle aimless life. When he could extort funds from his mother he ran up to London and enjoyed a fine time of gaiety while his cash lasted.

Again and again his cousin, Sir Norman, was appealed to to find him some "gentlemanly post," but as this meant a post with a liberal salary and nothing to do, the Baronet invariably refused.

Mrs. Stuart's income was a pension, and died with her, so that the problem of her children's future was really a serious one.

Helen Cheviot, who liked and pitied her cousin Lottie, had just been calling at Lindenhurst and had brought home the news Aunt Mary was going to have a young lady to board with her.

Miss Smith needed society and training, she was an heiress, and did not "get on" with her own relations. Her trustees offered thirty pounds a month if Mrs. Stuart would undertake the charge of her, and the widow had clinched the bargain before even mentioning it to her relations.

"Of course it is plain enough," said Nell, with more bitterness than she often showed; "Miss Smith has money, Max has none. No matter how ugly or common she is, she can spare him the vulgar necessity of working for his own living. And so Aunt Mary will move Heaven and earth to bring about a match between them."

"Helen," said her mother, gravely, "you must not talk in such a way; it is most objectionable." Helen pouted.

"Can't you do something to save us from Miss Smith, mother? Surely you can make Aunt Mary see that if she and Lotty run in and out of this house as they please, they must not expect their lodger to do the same."

"When is she coming?"

"This afternoon. Haven't they kept it close? I fancy Aunt Mary was vexed with Lotty for telling me. She wanted to steal a march on us, and bring her 'dear young friend' in some morning before we knew of her existence. But, mother, don't let her."

"It is Norman's house, not mine, dear."

"Norman detests Aunt Mary and Max. For poor, dear Lotty he has only a kind of contemptuous pity. You may be sure Norman will back you up, mother."

She tripped out of the room, and Lady Maude left off her letter writing and tried to think of some way out of the difficulty. An Earl's daughter, she had her share of pride, and she hated her sister-in-law's last scheme quite as much as her little Nell could wish; only with Mrs. Stuart living at her gates, she really did not see how, without a family quarrel, she could refuse to receive Miss Smith.

"What's the matter?" said a deep, musical voice as Sir Norman put his head into the boudoir. "You look in tribulation, master."

"Come in, Norman, I want to talk to you."

"What is it? Oh, come, I can guess! Nell has just heard the latest news from Lindenhurst."

"What! you know it already?"

"Only so far that Maxwell took it into his head to call on me this morning, and poured the whole history into my ears."

"It will be most trying."

"To us, or Miss Smith?" asked Sir Norman, dryly. "To tell you the truth, master, I feel rather inclined to pity her."

"Do tell me all you hear about her. How did the Stuarts find her?"

"Oh, you know Lotty went to a fashionable school at Eastbourne, and she has kept up a correspondence with the principal's daughter, and this Miss Smith was educated there. In fact, I believe my amiable cousin was there for a year or so with her. Anyway, Miss Smith's trustees asked Mrs. Seymour to recommend a home for their ward. Mrs. Seymour thought of the Stuarts, and the thing arranged itself."

"Is there anything against her, Norman?"

"She has fifty thousand pounds, and doesn't get on well at home; that's all I heard."

"And—must we visit her?"

Sir Norman burst out laughing; he really could not help it.

"Oh, master, mater, things must be come to a pretty pass if you expect me to advise you on social points."

"It is your house, you know, Norman."

"But I never want you to receive anyone in it against your wishes," he answered quietly. "My own feeling is, that Miss Smith won't stay long at Lindenhurst; for thirty pounds a month her trustee will expect more than my worthy aunt can accomplish; and, to tell you the truth, mater, I feel sorry for her."

"For your aunt?"

"No, for the rich Miss Smith. You know what the Stuarts are. Lotty is an amiable idiot; the other two utterly unprincipled. They will take this girl's money and laugh at her in their sleeve if—as I expect—she proves unpolished."

"She won't do that; Mrs. Seymour will know better," replied Lady Maude, "and Norman, I must settle something."

"Well, I should call on her," said Sir Norman, slowly, "just as if she were any other new comer. If Aunt Mary tries to inflict her on us too often, you can make a stand. The fact is, I am afraid the poor girl will be inveigled into an engagement with that scoundrel, Maxwell, and then Heaven help her! If she comes here you might be able, supposing you saw signs of such a thing, to warn her."

"Norman, you speak as if you were six years instead of thirty."

"I'm quite an old fogey. If I don't mind strangers will take Nell for my daughter before long."

"I wish you would marry and have daughters of your own."

Norman smiled.

"Once bitten, twice shy. I was engaged at twenty-one as you know. She jilted me for a

richer man. I've no doubt she did me a kindness. I have met her often enough since not to envy her husband, but the misfortune is, mater, with my trust in her went all my faith in women. I shall never marry now. I should always be fancying I was taken for Cheviot Court and its ten thousand a-year if I did."

"Norman, there are such things as happy marriages."

"Of course there are, yours was one," he said kindly, "and if Nell will listen to Jack Digby, I fancy hers will be another; but I've past the age for that sort of thing. For the last nine years I've never cared to look at a woman's face for a second thime. I have my books and music, I have you to do the honours of the Court, and Nell to be its sunshine, and I am quite content."

Lady Maude sighed as he went out. Norman was such a good fellow it did seem a pity his whole life should be blighted by a woman's treachery.

This was Saturday, Miss Smith was to arrive that very afternoon, and as the Cheviots were going to a tennis party, some six miles distant, Nell decided in her own mind they would be quite safe from intrusion till Monday, while on Sunday they would be able to take stock of the new arrival in church.

Sir Norman did not go to the party. He hated tennis, and was not of a sociable turn of mind. He drove over to Deepdale Station in his dog-cart to fetch some books he expected to find there; but just as he reached the platform the down train from London came in, and he had to wait till it had gone before he found a porter to attend to him; then as he was about to leave the station with his parcel, he saw a young girl, evidently a stranger, looking round in a perplexed, bewildered fashion.

"There's no train for Deepdale-road, Miss, till six o'clock," said a porter civilly in reply to her question. "It's only just a wayside station, and very few trains stop there."

"Is it far from here?" asked the girl in a troubled tone. "I never thought of there being a nearer station than Deepdale."

"Deepdale-road station is seven miles from here, Miss, but most likely where you want to go is somewhere between the two."

"The address is Lindenhurst, Deepdale. Mrs. Stuart said she would meet me at the station, and I thought she meant Deepdale."

Sir Norman approached and lifted his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said in his grave, courteous way, "but I am Mrs. Stuart's nephew. I shall pass her house as I drive home; will you allow me to repair her neglect by taking you to Lindenhurst?"

"But it will be giving you so much trouble."

"Not at all. I am only afraid if you have much luggage it may have to wait for the train, as I am driving a dog-cart, and there is not much room."

"I have only these two boxes, but I could do without them easily."

"Those two will go at the back, I expect nicely," said her friend in need, "and now we had better introduce ourselves. I am Norman Cheviot, and I think you must be Miss Smith."

She blushed and acknowledged that she was. The porter brought out the boxes, Norman handed her to her seat, sprang up behind her, and took the reins from the groom.

"Have an eye to the boxes, James."

"Yes, Sir Norman," which speech revealed to Olive Smith her companion's rank.

It was five years and a half since old Mr. Jenkins' will had made her an heiress. She was now nearly nineteen, and the plain awkward child had grown into a very attractive girl. The dark hair was braided now in coils, round the shapely head, only the front was allowed to stray in soft, fluffy curls, almost touching the broad, white brow; her complexion had cleared, and was a beautiful pink and white, but her dark, eyes still had their old, wistful expression, as though the years had not brought happiness to the rich Miss Smith.

And indeed they had brought much pain; the conditions of Mr. Jenkins' will had not smoothed matters for his poor little heiress; at school Olive carried all before her by her rare talents, but her

holidays at home were a distinct failure. Alice Jenkins, always a kind friend to Olive, would gladly have let her spend every vacation at her house, but Mrs. Smith, with the idea perhaps of future benefits, would not allow Olive to become a stranger to her sisters, and at least two out of the three yearly vacations had to be spent at Brixton, where her relatives took a delight in throwing their poverty in Olive's face, there was no payment for her board; but Mrs. Jenkins strongly suspected a good proportion of the girl's pocket money went in presents.

It was she who had urged on her husband and the other trustee to find a home for Olive away from Brixton now, alleging the child ought to see a little of the world, and that she was getting thin and careworn under the influence of her mother's repeated alights.

Mrs. Jenkins would have opened her home gladly to Olive, but at this juncture her only son was dangerously ill, and much of her time was taken up with him, so she was powerless to help her poor little favourite.

The trustees applied to Mrs. Seymour with the result that Olive was to spend at least six months at Lindenhurst; only Mr. Ross, with a lawyer's caution, provided that she should be free to leave at any time by a week's notice, provided the notice expired at the end of a month. He would have brought her to Lindenhurst himself, only that Mrs. Stuart described it as an easy journey, and assured him she would send to meet Miss Smith at Deepdale station, the truth being the wily widow had carefully not mentioned that she had a grown-up son, and did not wish the trustees to take up the suspicion Max might lay siege to the heiress.

They were out of the town before Sir Norman attempted to talk to his companion.

"Were you ever in Southshire before? We think it a very pretty county."

"No, I never was so far from London before," she said frankly, "but I am very fond of the country, and Mrs. Stuart wrote that there were lovely pieces of scenery I should like to sketch."

"I believe there are; I am no artist myself, but my little sister is fond of sketching. I hope you and Nell will be good friends, Miss Smith."

If only Nell could have heard him! But Sir Norman's heart was touched by the lonely girl whose life had been so desolate.

"Thank you," and Olive blushed crimson.

"I hope Mrs. Stuart won't be vexed at my mistake about the station. I read it Deepdale Junction, and so did my guardian, Mr. Ross."

"To tell you the truth, Miss Smith, Aunt Mary writes a most perplexing hand, but we always use the junction ourselves; there are only three trains a day to Deepdale Road."

"But Mrs. Stuart prefers the last."

"It is only a mile from her house, and she does not keep a carriage," he explained. "I hope you are not expecting a very grand establishment Miss Smith; we Southshire folks live very quietly."

"I have come from a ten-roomed house in a Brixton street," said Olive frankly, "and I am frightened to death of grand people; Mrs. Seymour said she should never make me a credit to her."

Sir Norman smiled kindly.

"I hope you will like Deepdale; Lindenhurst, my aunt's house, is close to the village street."

"And do you live near?"

"Pretty near. Our lodge is nearly opposite the gates of Lindenhurst."

"How pleasant for you to live so near to each other."

"I'm afraid I am not a very sociable person, Miss Smith. I don't think I have been to Lindenhurst for a year."

Her eyes expressed such surprise that he went on.

"My mother calls me a hermit, and Helen says I am a bookworm; I am afraid I like my studies better than anything else."

"There is nothing like study," said Olive Smith, her dark eyes flashing with eagerness. "I did so want to go to Girton when I left school; I had quite set my heart upon it."

"And wouldn't your guardians let you?"

"No; I mean to go yet someday, only I must

wait till I am twenty-one. Father says it is nonsense, and so much education is thrown away upon girls, but I don't think it is!"

"No, indeed," agreed Norman; "do you know, Miss Smith, I fancied you were an orphan."

"I have a father and mother," said the girl slowly, "only I have been away so much I don't seem to belong to them. Then I have four sisters and three brothers, the youngest is quite a baby, so you see there are a lot of us."

"And you are the eldest?"

"No, I am number three; I used to be the middle one till the boys came; there is a gap of ten years between the eldest of the three brothers and my youngest sister."

Sir Norman felt more and more perplexed; she must be an heiress, for the Stuarts had been told so authoritatively; but why she should require guardians and a home with strangers he could not make out."

As they reached the village street he noticed she grew strangely quiet, he almost fancied she was frightened.

"They won't be expecting me," she said suddenly, "if they think I have gone to the other station."

"Aunt Mary always has tea at half-past-four, we shall just be in time."

"You will come in," the girl's voice had almost a ring of entreaty. "Oh, Sir Norman, please do; then you can tell Mrs. Stuart it was not my fault."

"I am coming," he said gravely, "I want to see you safe in my aunt's care."

"Mistress is out, sir," said the parlour-maid, who regarded Sir Norman with great respect; "she went over to the tennis party with Mr. Maxwell; but they will be here by six."

"Is Miss Charlotte in?"

"Yes, sir."

But at that moment a stout heavy-looking young woman came to the door, her face was very kind, and her smile hearty, but for all that Charlotte Stuart was a great trial to her astute mother, who knew perfectly that her daughter was painfully plain and intensely stupid.

By this time Norman had leaped down and handed Olive from her seat.

"Here, Lotty," he said to his astonished cousin, "see, I've brought Miss Smith; I found her at the station like a parcel waiting to be called for. Now I hope you've got some tea ready, we're dreadfully thirsty."

Charlotte took Olive's hand and began a stream of apologies. If she had only known—mother would be so angry with her, and there was tea in the drawing-room, they must both come in at once.

It was a charming drawing-room. Mrs. Stuart enjoyed the use of the furniture left in Lindenhurst for nearly half a century, and the whirl of fashion had gone round till the spindle-legged chairs and sofa, the tulip-wood tables, and quaint tapestry curtains of soft eastern hues were quite the correct thing. The tea was good and strong. The cake rich and appetizing—Mrs. Stuart's poverty being the poverty which goes in for sharp bargains and making people wait for their money, rather than the sort which implies plain fare and self denial.

Charlotte on hospitable cares intent forgot her apologies and showed herself at her best, kind and good-natured. Olive began to think her lines had fallen in pleasant places, and by the time Sir Norman took leave, she had lost all fear of his cousin.

"Oh," Charlotte sank on to the sofa with a sigh of relief, "I am thankful he is gone. You poor dear thing weren't you scared to death driving seven miles alone with him. Norman Cheviot is the most disagreeable person I know. His eyes seem to go through me."

Olive laughed.

"My dear Miss Stuart, I thought it very kind of him to come to my help, and I liked him very much."

"Pray don't tell mother so," groaned Charlotte.

"But why not?"

"She detests Norman."

"I thought he was her nephew."

"So he is, but he has treated mother and all

of us very, very badly. You see he is awfully rich ; he has ten thousand a year and heaps of land."

Olive Smith was a young person of strong opinions. She had taken a fancy to her kind friend in need, and she would not hear him condemned without reason.

"What has he done to your mother?" she asked. "I thought he spoke very nicely of her."

"Mother isn't rich," said Lottie, who had heard this story told so often, she quite believed it ; "and uncle Edward (Norman's father) used to help her a great deal. Then five years ago he persuaded her to come and settle here that she might be near him. Of course we expected he would leave her an income, but instead he only left her the use of this house for life and asked Norman to help her. Norman has done nothing for us. He won't even get Maxwell a situation. His sister Helen is a dear thing, and I am very fond of her ; but Norman and Lady Maude are so stuck up there in no bearing them."

"Who is Lady Maude?"

"Norman's stepmother. Everyone expected she would retire to the Dower House when uncle Edward died. Really, she is not nearly so much related to Norman as mother is. She's no claim on him ; but though she's lots of money of her own he keeps her at the Court, and she is mistress of everything. Mother could have done the honours for him till he married, or she would have sacrificed her feelings and gone to live with him if he had asked her ; but he preferred to keep his haughty step-mother, and she is so proud she treats us just like poor relations."

"Doesn't she visit you?"

"She very seldom comes here ; but mother is so forgiving she goes up to the Court just the same. We generally lunch there two or three times a week, and of course we go to all their parties ; but I'm keeping you standing. Let me show you your rooms. Your maid is here, mother engaged her last week."

A maid for Olive's special use and a private sitting-room with a piano in it had been pointedly stipulated for by the trustees. The maid proved a pleasant-faced girl of about Olive's own age. She had been a pet Sunday-school pupil of Lady Maude's, and had been trained at the Court under her ladyship's own maid ; the latter was to be married at Christmas when Allen would take her place. Meanwhile she did dressmaking at home, and had now come to Lindenhurst, more because she did not like to disoblige a relation of "the family," than because she needed to take a temporary place.

Olive was thankful when Charlotte left her alone with the maid. Miss Stuart's flow of language was perfectly wearying.

"You are very tired, Miss," said Allen, respectfully. "If you'll give me your keys I'll soon unpack your things while you take a rest on the sofa. Dinner is at seven, so I need not disturb you for another hour."

Olive was glad to comply with the suggestion. She was soon asleep, but her slumbers must have been light indeed, for half an hour later a tap at the door awoke her, and though she kept her eyes closed, she lost not a word of the conversation.

"Miss Smith is asleep, ma'am," from Allen.

"How tiresome! Well, don't disturb her, and, Allen, tell her she need not dress for dinner if she is too tired."

But Allen had quietly selected a soft, white dress of fine cashmere trimmed with filmy lace, and the palest shade of salmon silk, and when Olive came through the sitting-room door into the bedroom she did not attempt to deliver Mrs. Stuart's message."

"There are no visitors to-night, miss," said the girl, "so I thought this would do."

She coiled the pretty dark hair high on the graceful head, rearranged the soft, fluffy curls in front, and then fastened the soft white dress, with the private opinion that except her own Miss Nell, she had never seen a more charming lady than the rich Miss Smith.

Olive gave one look in the mirror. The dress suited her to perfection, and she knew it, but her own attractions had never given the girl one

thrill of pleasure. Her mother had told her so often she was the plain one of the family that, poor child, she honestly believed the improvement in her looks since she grew up to be due to the advantages of dress. Susy, with her fair hair and rosy cheeks, was the Smith type of beauty, and from that poor Olive knew she wandered far. She gave one sigh, poor girl, to the memory of her uncongenial home, and unloving relations, and then she went reluctantly downstairs to meet Mrs. Stuart.

CHAPTER II.

OLIVE saw a small, pretty-looking woman dressed in slight mourning ; she turned and welcomed the girl with a smile and kiss, her gentle caressing manner being very pleasant to Olive after the stern, undemonstrativeness of her own home.

"My dear child," queried the widow, "what must you think of us? Let me introduce you to my son Max, the prop of my old age. Lottie, you know already."

Maxwell Stuart was by far the handsomest man Olive had ever met. With many girls of eighteen his mother's scheme might have succeeded easily, but Olive, though not suspicious or distrustful, was by nature a good judge of character. She thought Maxwell's manner weak, and a trifle cruel. She hated his half-teasing manner to his sister, and did not enjoy the excessive contrast of his honeyed politeness to herself.

Dinner was well served and went off pleasantly, for if Charlotte was stupid, her mother and Max knew how to talk and to talk well. The meal over, they left Max—presumably to drink some more claret, Charlotte strolled into the garden, and Mrs. Stuart took Olive into her own little sanctum, half boudoir, half dressing-room.

"I want you to feel you can come to me here in any trouble, dear child," she said, tenderly ; "for I wish to try and fill a mother's part to you."

"You are very kind, but you know I have a mother, and—"

"A mother of your own, dear child ! I thought it must be a step-mother, from what I heard."

"She is my own mother," replied Olive ; "but, from circumstances, I have lived a great deal away from home. I would rather not discuss her, please, Mrs. Stuart."

The widow saw her mistake, and began to talk of other things—her house, her friends, the society to be had, and, lastly, her relations.

"We all pitied you so for having to put up with poor Norman's society ; he is so very abrupt and bearish."

"He was very kind."

"Ah, I expect he tried to be, but he is a regular misanthrope, he hates all women, wouldn't have one inside his house if he could help it."

"I thought his mother and sister lived with him ?"

"So they do, but quite apart. Norman has his own rooms. Such a contrast to my dear boy, who can't bear to be away from us."

"Does Mr. Stuart live with you ?"

"Chiefly ; being an artist, he can pursue his profession as well here as anywhere else ; and it is such a pleasure to us to have him."

"Does he paint landscape or figures ?—Has he exhibited at all ?"

It was an awkward question, and the widow was glad that Charlotte's entrance spared her an answer.

Lottie proposed a stroll round the garden, and, kind as Mrs. Stuart seemed, Olive felt a great relief when the *tête-à-tête* was thus broken up.

They all went to church on Sunday, and Sir Norman's dark head in the corner of the Court pew seemed to Olive to be a friend's. She little guessed how much she was discussed at the Court luncheon table.

"Miss Smith has a very striking face," said Lady Maude. "I hope your aunt will make her happy at Lindenhurst."

"She has the saddest face I ever saw," declared Helen ; "and mother, please don't laugh at me

after all my protests against Aunt Mary's boarder. I do believe I have lost my heart to her after all."

"What would you say if I told you I had spoken to her, Nell?"

And Norman gave them the history of the drive.

"An artist and a lover of books!" said Neil. "Well, she won't get much sympathy from the family at Lindenhurst."

"I thought Max was an artist!"

"Max! No one ever saw a picture of him. He likes to wear his hair long, and put on loose velvet coats ; I believe, too, he can talk a little artistic slang—that's all."

"Nell, I do think you are hard on him," said her mother.

"No, I'm not ; he is idle, extravagant, and bad tempered. If Aunt Mary prevails on the rich Miss Smith to marry him—why, I pity her."

The call was made in due course, and the ladies were at home ; but it puzzled Nell to see how on the alert Mrs. Stuart was to prevent their getting in a word with her new guest unheard by herself. It really seemed as though she and Lottie relieved guard, and the visitors went home not knowing much more of Miss Smith.

"Well," said Norman, at dinner, "what is your report?"

"I like her," said Lady Maude, frankly ; "but we shall never get to know her. Mrs. Stuart evidently means to keep her aloof from us."

"Isn't it odd I should have inveigled so against her coming here ; and been so afraid we should have too much of her?" asked Helen.

But Charlotte Stuart sprained her foot when Olive had been at Lindenhurst a fortnight. Her mother was a very bad walker. The young stranger could not exactly be sent out alone, while to constitute Maxwell her sole escort would have been rather too marked even for Mrs. Stuart, so a note was sent up to the Court beseeching Nell to come to the rescue. One long country ramble with Olive won the spoilt child's heart, and from that day she counted the rich Miss Smith as her own special friend.

"It's awful foolish of you, mother!" said Max with filial frankness, when he watched the pair start with their sketch-books one bright July day. "That's the third morning this week Helen has kidnapped Miss Smith. It will mean lunch at the Court, and my young lady not coming back till five."

"Well, really Max, it is awfully dull for her here ; I am no walker. We have not a carriage, and we can't expect Miss Smith to pay thirty pounds a month, and then be confined to our garden."

"I suppose you mean me to marry her?" said Max, peevishly. "I'm sure you talked enough about it before she came."

"I think you will be very foolish if you don't," retorted his mother. "Sixty thousand pounds is not to be picked up every day, and she's a very nice girl, good-looking, and quite passable in manners."

"Sixty thousand pounds is worth some sacrifice," admitted Max, "but the girl's not my style. She's as black as night, while I admire fair women, and she's so terribly in earnest talking to her quite wears me out."

"That'll pass when she's a little older. She will make you a charming wife, and as her money is settled on her, her guardians can't raise any difficulties. You have only got to win her heart."

"You don't go the way to help me," grumbled Max, "or you wouldn't send her to Cheviot Court ; the people there detest me pretty thoroughly."

"I don't think they ever speak against you," replied his mother ; "and of course it is to their interests you should have a rich wife. My income dies with me, and unless you marry, Sir Norman must provide for you when I go."

"I don't fancy he'd see the 'must,' and I would much prefer the rich wife ; but you are not going yet mother, and, meanwhile, please give me a fiver. I'm beastly hard up, and paying court to Miss Smith costs something. I'm sure I've spent a pound on music and such trifles since she came."

Charlotte was stupid in many things but she echoed Maxwell's warning.

"They don't like Max at the Court, mamma. Do you think they will prejudice Olive against him?"

"There's nothing they can say against him, except that he's poor, which is not a crime, poor boy."

"They think he is idle."

"Oh, what does it matter what they think? Max is gone out for the day. If Olive is out and I can have a make-up lunch; if she is at home we must have three courses, and everything set out fit for a party. You never think of my pocket."

Meanwhile Olive was perfectly happy. Helen Cheviot exactly suited her. Their love of art drew them together, and Lady Maude received her with a kindly hospitality which won her heart; while Norman came more out of his shell than his sister had ever seen him, and actually lent her volumes from his own beloved book shelves, not from those in the grand library, but a set in his special den filled with his favourite books, so that the intimacy grew apace, and before Charlotte could walk about again as usual it had come to be an accepted fact that Olive Smith and Helen Cheviot should spend at least part of each day together. And no one at the Court ever said a word against the Stuarts to Olive. A kind of loyalty prevented their attempting to prejudice her against her hosts, while Helen was far too refined to mention love or marriage to so recent an acquaintance, and had accepted her mother's verdict that Miss Smith was too true a woman to be deceived by such a weak, irresolute man as Maxwell Stuart.

And all the time Max was "paying his addresses," he never lost a chance of being with Olive. He sang with her, played her accompaniments, devoted himself to her amusement, he showed her pointedly he valued her opinion and her society, and, in fact, everyone but a very unsophisticated girl must have seen his aim.

Olive never once guessed it; she thought it Maxwell's second nature to pay compliments and talk airy nothings. To her he was Charlotte's brother and the son of her present chaperon. Olive never thought of such subjects as love or marriage. Her plan in life was very different. When she was twenty-one and her own mistress, she hoped to go to Girton, and become a graduate; later she meant to go in entirely for science, and become as learned as a venerable professor.

So, being perfectly heart-whole herself, and being quick enough to see that Maxwell was an idle, frivolous young man, she attached no meaning to his "pretty speeches," and treated him in a frank friendly fashion, which was at once disconcerting and perplexing to the penniless artist, who was far too conceited to understand such conduct.

Things were at this stage, and the rich Miss Smith had been at Lindenhurst nearly two months, when Lady Maude and her daughter left the Court to spend a month at the seaside.

The hot weather had made Nell look pale, and her mother was anxious that she should spend the rest of August by the sea. They were going to Westbourne, a pretty watering-place only about fifty miles off, and Sir Norman promised to run down sometimes to see them.

"Surely Norman will never stay at the Court alone," said Mrs. Stuart sweetly to her sister-in-law.

"Why not? he is old enough to take care of himself," returned Lady Maude smiling. "I expect he will bury himself among his books, like the veritable hermit he is."

But for all that, Mrs. Stuart's manner troubled her, and the night before she left home she spoke to her stepson of it.

"Norman, I wish you would go and see your aunt sometimes while I'm away."

"My dear mater, what sin have I committed that you should wish to punish me?"

"She seemed so put out when she heard you were remaining at the Court, that I feel convinced she means to do something she is ashamed of."

Sir Norman looked up quickly.

"I say, mater, do you mean it?"

"Yes; I am seriously uneasy. Norman, I

don't call myself a gossip, but people *will* tell me things. Your cousin Maxwell is staving off his creditor's demands by saying he is on the point of marrying an heiress, and I have been asked twice lately if it was true that he and Miss Smith were engaged."

Norman whistled.

"They can't marry that child to him against her will, and it's not to their interest to quarrel with her. Mark my words, mater, Miss Smith won't marry Maxwell. If his family make things unpleasant for her she'll write to her guardians."

But Lady Maude was unconvinced.

"You know Allen, Norman, my pet *protégé*; she is at Lindenhurst acting as Miss Smith's maid."

"Well!" in rather a loud tone.

"She came up yesterday and asked to see me, and she mentioned that Mrs. Stuart had told her of Miss Smith's engagement to her son, but asked her not to speak of it to the young lady as it was to be kept secret till her guardians had been told of it. Allen declared to me that Miss Smith, she was positive, had no intention of marrying Maxwell; she wanted me to inform the young lady that the report was being circulated."

Norman drew a long breath.

"And you refused?"

"I went to Lindenhurst yesterday, and again to day, but I could not get a word alone with Olive. I left a note asking her to tea, but she never came, and—I feel uneasy. But for Nell's looking so white and ill, I declare I would give up this Westbourne expedition and stay at home."

"And as you can't do that, you want to leave me on guard in your stead?"

"I want you to keep your eyes open; if there seems anything unusual going on at Lindenhurst telegraph for me, I could quite well leave Nell to Lady Digby's care for a day or two and come home."

"I'll keep guard," was Norman's reply, "but I can't say that I relish the task."

CHAPTER III.

It was a lovely day in September, warm and balmy, just the weather for a picnic, and yet as Olive Smith stood in her room ready dressed for a long excursion to a ruined castle about thirty miles from Deepdale, she did not look in the least like enjoyment.

Things had been going all wrong with the poor little heiress lately. First she missed Lady Maude and Nell terribly, and though they had been gone nearly three weeks yet there was no talk of their return; and then Maxwell Stuart had suddenly secured a *lîte à lîte* with her, and dismayed her by the offering her his hand and heart.

He had pleaded his cause well and eloquently, but he made no impression on Olive; specious as were his protestations they did not ring true, and inexperienced as Olive was she felt pretty sure it was her money and not herself he sought, but her refusal was based solely on her not caring for him; of course there was a scene, Mrs. Stuart reproached her son for trying to inveigle the heiress into an engagement unbeknown to her guardians, and insisted that he should leave the house; but to Olive the widow confessed she felt for her poor boy's disappointment, his was such an ardent sensitive nature he would feel the rejection keenly.

Olive would only too gladly have left Deepdale, but she found that to do so would be regarded by Mrs. Stuart as a positive injury, little short of insult. Again, just then she had no one of whom to seek advice; Mr. Ross was spending his holiday in Switzerland; Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins had started on a long sea voyage with their suffering son Willie; even the family at Brixton were out of reach, having gone to Southend for change of air. Olive was practically alone in the world, and so there seemed nothing for it but to stay where she was, and ignore the episode of Maxwell's proposal.

A letter received this morning told her Mr. Ross would be back in England in a week, and

Olive made up her mind to write and ask him to come down to Deepdale as soon as possible; he had always shown her great kindness, and she felt he would not refuse to come to her rescue.

The picnic at Vale Leston she regarded as an unmitigated nuisance. The Churtons, a large, noisy family from Deepdale, had got it up and invited the guests; the party numbered over twenty, and not one was a special favourite with Olive, while the arrangements were made with such a due regard for economy that the expedition seemed very commonplace.

Vale Leston was a tiny station honoured by almost as few trains as Deepdale Road; they would have to start at eleven and return at nine, which meant a very long day, and the prospect of ten hours among uncongenial people did not at all please Olive.

The maid, Allen, had dressed her, and now lingered in the room as though anxious to say something.

"What is it?" asked Olive kindly, she was always courteous to servants, and Allen was a special favourite of hers. "Do you want to go home? I am sure you can, the train doesn't leave Vale Leston till eight, and we can't be home till after nine."

"It wasn't that, Miss Smith," Allen's fingers twitched nervously at her white apron. "I'm afraid of offending you, ma'am, but — did you know Mr. Stuart is going to this picnic?"

Olive blushed crimson, she answered quietly,

"I did not know it; thank you for telling me," and then she went in search of Mrs. Stuart. They very nearly quarrelled; Olive declared she would not go to the picnic. Mrs. Stuart said to stay away would be positive rudeness to the Churtons and a cruel slight to Maxwell.

"The poor boy is only coming for a sight of you," said the mother tearfully, "you need not speak to him unless you like, but it's hard if you can't sit at the same table with him for half an hour without making a fuss."

The same tablecloth, she meant, seeing tables are not a part of picnic arrangements.

"If you stay we must all stay," said Mrs. Stuart. "I know my duty too well to leave you here alone for a whole day. Poor Lottie and I have been looking forward to the expedition, but I suppose we must give it up."

She conquered by that last thrust. Olive said not another word, but prepared to accompany them to the railway station.

In the booking office Mrs. Stuart had not the right change, and appealed to Olive for ten shillings.

"There it is," said the girl, cheerfully, handing her half a sovereign, "but do you know I've done such a stupid thing, brought hardly any money with me. This leaves me with sixpence."

"I'll change a sovereign and give you back the ten shillings when we pass a shop."

"I don't want it," said Olive, laughing. "I don't expect there's anything to buy at Vale Leston."

At Deepdale Junction they changed trains and met the rest of the party. Maxwell was with the Churtons, but seemed to have attached himself to the oldest girl, and to have no eyes for anyone else. Olive drew a long breath of relief, and began to think the picnic would not be so terrible after all.

It proved better far than she had expected, perhaps because her visions of it had been very bad indeed. The Churtons, if a trifle noisy, were very good-hearted. One of the daughters sketched a little, and she and Olive wandered away by the riverside after dinner with their pencils and blocks, most of the others paired off. Olive could not see what became of Maxwell Stuart, but it was relief enough to her that he did not try to join her, and Lucy Churton. It was a long afternoon and rather dull, but it passed off without any untoward incident.

At tea everyone declared the next thing to be done was to climb a hill and look down on the river by sunset. Mrs. Stuart observed quietly they "must not miss the train, as it was the last that night. It left Vale Leston at eight. For her part she was tired. They were a mile from the station, and she did not mean to add to the walk by climbing the hill."

"I will stay with you," said Olive, good-naturedly; but the widow would not hear of it, and insisted on her going with the others. The little discussion had delayed her, and when she began to climb the grassy slope the rest were out of sight.

Suddenly her heart stood still. There in the distance she saw Maxwell Stuart evidently coming to join her. Hardly recking what she did Olive turned sharply away from the footpath, and cowered down beneath some tall gorse bushes, hoping they would hide her; but she heard his steps evidently in pursuit, and so she went on and plunged into a narrow path the other side of the bushes, which she believed would lead her to the others, without bringing her face to face with her tormentor.

On and on she went, hoping each moment to meet them, and relieved that Maxwell had evidently given up pursuit since there was no trace of him in sight; but just as after a long climb she came up to the summit of the hill, and saw the picturesque ruins bathed in a flood of golden light from the setting sun, to her horror someone stepped quickly forward and took her hand. She did not need to raise her eyes, she felt it was Maxwell.

"Caught at last," he said, mockingly. "My pretty wild bird you have given me a deal of trouble. Why have you avoided me so?"

"I haven't," said Olive, stoutly; "but I own I don't think we shall either of us have any pleasure from being together."

"I differ from you."

He had placed himself so that it was impossible for her to move without his leave. The summit of the hill was steep and pointed, he blocked the easiest descent, the other looked slippery, and was besides longer.

"Where are the others?" asked Olive. "I want to find Lucy Churtton."

"She turned back at my request to keep my mother company."

"And the others?"

"Their courage was not equal to the climb. They tried it at the steepest part and it discouraged them. They had all turned to go back when you took such pains to hide yourself behind the gorse; but for that little manœuvre you must have seen them."

"I must make haste back now," said Olive, trying hard to treat Maxwell like an ordinary acquaintance. "I suppose this is the best way down." There was a mocking light in his eyes as he moved to let her pass; but Olive did not speak to him again; she had all her wits cut out to manage the steep descent without a tumble. As to have, that was impossible; but Olive did not trouble herself much. Her watch declared it to be half-past seven, and she knew she could walk from the foot of the hill to the station in less than a quarter of an hour; it was far too small a place for cabs to be met with by chance.

"You'd better be friends," said Maxwell in her ear. "I'm awfully fond of you, Olive, and all I've done has been from love of you. You ought to remember that."

"I can't talk," she said. "I'm so tired, and there's another mile to do when we get to the bottom of the hill."

It came to her with a sense of dismay that the others must have gone on and left her to her fate. There was not a trace of them, and, what was worse, she had forgotten which way to turn to the station.

"To the right," said Maxwell cheerfully; and as she looked at him doubtfully, "Anyhow, that's the way we came this morning."

And it was, for after walking a few yards Olive recognized a tiny cottage which had taken her fancy; on and on she hurried till, worn out with fatigue and nearly breathless, she at last saw the little wayside station gleaming in the distance.

There was no one in the booking-office, no one in the waiting-room. Olive went on to the platform with a strange sinking at her heart. She had expected to see Lottie and two or three Churttons at the door beckoning to her with all their might to make haste; but there was no one—actually not even a porter could be seen. Olive caught her breath in dismay, and then her eyes rested suddenly on the station clock.

"Half-past eight!"

She looked at her watch, which still wanted five minutes to the hour. It must have stopped, or—the suspicion made her turn white as death—had it been put back on purpose in the morning while she left it on her dressing-table?

Half past eight—pitch dark—alone in a strange place with only sixpence in her pocket (Mrs. Stuart had forgotten to return the ten shillings)! What was she to do?

All this time Maxwell lounged at some little distance. She took not the slightest notice of him, but, going to the cloak-room, she hammered so violently at the door as to bring out a shock-headed boy porter.

"When is the next train to Deepdale Road?"

"There haint one to-night, miss."

"When is there one to Deepdale Junction?" wondering if she could walk the seven miles.

"Not before the morning."

Olive made no comment. She uttered no indignant cry at the stupidity of the railway arrangements; she went back to the lonely platform and sat down on a bench to think.

What was to be done? She saw the Stuarts scheme at last. Maxwell was to pose as her friend-in-need. Gratitude to him for his timely aid would induce her to marry him (poor Olive! she had not half fathomed the cruel plot against her yet); but if she could possibly manage without his help she would give him no claim on her gratitude.

If only she had had money she would have tried to hire a carriage to take her part of the way, and perhaps at some large station on the road she could have found a train to Deepdale; but, with only sixpence in her pocket, this was hopeless.

She had her watch, which was of some value, but there was not a single shop, except a public house, in Vale Leston; so that to dispose of it, or try to raise money on it, was impossible.

The evening air began to get raw and cold. Olive's wraps had been left with the hamper; she had nothing over her thin summer dress, and she shivered again and again. Common sense told her she must put her pride in her pocket and let Maxwell take her home.

He must have seen some sign of relenting in her manner, for he suddenly joined her and sat down on the bench at her side.

"Well," he said quietly, "what are you going to do?"

"I suppose you mean to go home; I'll come with you."

He shook his head.

"My dear Olive, it's impossible; there's no train out of here to-night for Deepdale."

"But we could hire a carriage; I would have done it before only I have no money."

"I will gladly be your banker, but there is nothing on wheels to be hired here for love or money, and thirty miles is a stiff drive. No, little lady, there's nothing for it but to spend the night at the village inn; it seems a quiet, decent place, and no doubt we can secure rooms."

Olive turned on him with flashing eyes.

"You know I cannot do that; you know I cannot go to an inn with a man who is no relation to me; you must be mad to propose such a thing."

"I am no relation to you now, but I shall soon be your husband; it's no use making a fuss, Olive, you will have to marry me now; twenty-two tongues will have carried the news of your escapade to Deepdale; everyone at the picnic believed us lovers, they won't imagine any harm in this little episode if we are married when we return. I have a special license in my pocket, there is a quaint old church here in the village, there you and I can be made man and wife, and I will take you back to Lindenhurst as Mrs. Maxwell Stuart."

The girl looked at him with a world of scorn shining in her dark eyes.

"Coward—I would rather die."

"Well," said Max, lightly, "there's nothing else for it, unless you want to emulate one of Shakespeare's heroines, I forget her name—Hero wasn't it—who was done to death by slanderous

tongues; I shall go across to the inn and order rooms."

"I shall not occupy them."

"Well, they'll turn you out of here when they lock up the station; I only wonder they haven't shut up for the night now."

Olive scowled no more answer, and he turned away with a light laugh.

She sat on where he had left her till a porter passed, not the shock-headed youth she had spoken to before, but an older man.

"You'd be more out of the wind the other side, missie," he said civilly; "that's where the train 'll come in, too."

"The train," she exclaimed fervently as a ray of hope came to her, "they told me there was not another to-night."

"There's no up train, missie, but there's one more down one, it's nearly due now."

A down train could not help her, but Olive was miserably cold, and so she thought she might as well take the porter's advice.

She glanced at the station clock as she crossed the bridge, a quarter past ten! why she had not been waiting two hours yet and it seemed like an entire night.

Why by this time everyone knew of the escapade—as Max called it—had they taken the news to Cheviot Court, and what did Sir Norman say?

It was strange how in her terrible loneliness Olive's thoughts turned to him. She felt if only he could know of her troubles he would help her in this time of awful need; her longing was not for her kind old guardian, nor for his motherly wife, but only for the grave reserved man most women feared, and yet whom she felt intuitively was to be trusted entirely.

Oh, how cold it was! an awful faint sickness seemed stealing over Olive; she felt as though she was losing consciousness, and yet she knew that Maxwell Stuart had not returned, and felt by instinct that the two red lights which were just visible in the distance must be those carried by the incoming train.

A vague hope seized her. If amongst the passengers to alight there was a woman capable of understanding her plight, she would tell her story and crave a night's shelter; alas, the chance seemed small that any lady would be returning home so late to such an obscure country station, yet it gave Olive courage and she placed herself within the range of the lamps so as to see quickly who alighted.

Only one person got out, a man; he said something to the guard who agreed, and then he came straight towards Olive. She looked up, and with a start their eyes met; the strangest thing was that neither showed surprise.

She had thought so much of Sir Norman Cheviot, it seemed the most natural thing he should be there, and he had come to Vale Leston purposely to find her. He muttered a hoarse "thank Heaven" and lifted her into the first-class carriage he just quitted, and then before she realised it the train was off again.

"Don't try to talk," said Sir Norman, as gently as though he were speaking to a child. "This train stops next at Westbourne, where my mother and sister are. I am taking you to them; and here is Allen to look after you."

Yes, in the opposite corner sat the neat maid, and, as Sir Norman turned away and began to look out of the steamy window, with great attention Allen produced two thick warm shawls and wrapped her young lady comfortably in them; then she took out a little flask of wine and held it to the cold, blue-tinged lips.

When Olive had swallowed some, the good girl placed another shawl under her head for a pillow, and begged her to try to go to sleep.

"We shan't be at Westbourne for half an hour, Miss Olive, and you look so tired."

In ten minutes the heiress was sleeping as peacefully as a little child.

She was still sleeping when Sir Norman lifted her into a fly at Westbourne Station; and when the next opened her eyes it was to find herself in a little white bed, with Lady Maude Cheviot watching her, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

CHAPTER IV.

"NORMAN, tell me everything," was his stepmother's petition, when at last she had time to sit down and talk to him.

Olive had taken some nourishment and was sleeping peacefully watched over by Allen. Nell had been in bed before the travellers arrived, and was forbidden to get up again by her mother, who promised to tell her everything in the morning.

"I want to," said Sir Norman, slowly, "I must tell you, mother; the Stuarts have behaved so atrociously that, scandal or not, I will never receive one of them beneath my roof again; and I think of sending my lawyer to see if Mrs. Stuart won't take an annual sum instead of the use of Lindenhurst."

"Have they been unkind to Olive? She looked like a poor little white ghost, but I would not let her talk; indeed she was too weak to try. I shall send for the doctor the first thing tomorrow. I fear she is going to be ill."

"To-day," said Norman, looking at the clock, "it is after one."

"Do go on with your story. What have the Stuarts done? I believe nothing can surprise me."

"It's bad enough. Maxwell proposed to Miss Smith a week ago; was refused, and left his mother's house, saying it was too painful for him to stay after his rejection."

"Well."

"He only went to Deepdale, and stayed with the Churtions. He persuaded them it was only a lovers' quarrel, and induced them to organise a picnic to Vale Leston, at which he and Olive might meet and make up their differences."

"All might have gone as they intended, but that girl Allen, has a sister in service at the Churtions; she wrote and told Allen of the picnic, and that Mr. Stuart and Miss Smith were to be left alone together and given time to make up their quarrels. I conclude she picked up the facts by listening at doors; it does not seem a subject the family would discuss before a servant."

"You don't know the Churtions, Norman; those girls would make quite a companion of a maid."

"Well, Allen seems to have felt uneasy. She told Miss Smith Mr. Stuart was to be at the picnic, but it did not make the young lady stay at home. After they had gone, Allen recollects Miss Smith's watch had been half an hour slow, and that she had not much money with her. She heard from one of the other servants that Mr. Maxwell's room was to be got ready in case he returned from the picnic with the others. Being a good-natured girl she offered to see to it; and while doing it she picked up a letter from a tradesman threatening Maxwell with legal proceedings if he was not married to Miss Smith by the first of October. I can't tell what romance the girl had been reading, but she at once got it into her head Miss Smith was going to be kidnapped at the picnic and kept in durante vile until she married Max. She came up to the Court and insisted on seeing me."

"Allen is braver than I gave her credit for," said Lady Maude, with a smile.

"Well, she begged of me to go to Vale Leston on some excuse and join the party. By this time it was five o'clock, and I could catch no train that would get me there before eight, when they were to leave. I told Allen I would go to Deepdale Road and meet their train, and if Miss Smith was not with them, I would go on to Vale Leston by the next down train. She immediately said she had better come too. I did not like the idea. However, when Mrs. Stuart arrived without Olive, and actually told some one jestingly in my hearing she 'had no idea what had become of the lovers; she hoped they hadn't eloped,' well, then I began to think the testimony of a respectable young woman like Allen might come in useful, and I wasn't sorry when all the picnic people had strolled off to find the maid by my side with a bundle. I took three first-class tickets to Westbourne, and I told the guard I had to 'pick up' a young lady at Vale Leston, and begged of him to give me five minutes' here if he could."

"And did he?"

"I didn't need them. As I got on to the platform the first thing I saw was Olive standing under a lamp, and looking more dead than alive. I picked her up and lifted her into the carriage. I couldn't ask her a single question; I just brought her to you."

"The very best thing you could have done. But where was Maxwell?"

"I haven't the least idea; in the waters of the Leiston, if he had his deserts."

"Well, I shall not trouble myself to relieve the Stuarts' anxiety. I will write to Olive's guardians as soon as she is well enough to give me their address."

"Do you mean you think she won't be all right to-morrow—to-day rather, when she wakes?"

A tap at the door preceded Lady Maude's reply; her gentle "Come in" produced Allen with an anxious face.

"Would you come to Miss Smith, please, my lady? She's woken up in an agony of fright, and seems to think she's alone again at Vale Leston. I can't pacify her anyhow, and her eyes are that bright and I'm afraid she's going to be very ill."

And very ill she was. Lady Maude and Allen watched by her all that night, and with the morning's light Sir Norman went in search of a doctor, whose verdict was prompt and short: brain fever, and a sharp attack.

CHAPTER V.

It was, as Norman had told his stepmother, one of the cruellest plots ever laid. No one but an utterly desperate woman would have devised such a scheme, much less tried to carry it out in the teeth of obstacles; but Mrs. Stuart had, in homely phraseology, "come to the end of her tether." She was in debt everywhere in the neighbourhood; she had foolishly made herself responsible for bill of Maxwell's, payable at three months, and she knew it would be presented early in November. Her son had long since drained her of all her valuables; the furniture of Lindenhurst was not hers to dispose of; there was no income due to her till January, and only the payments made by the trustees on the part of Olive Smith had enabled the widow to hold out so long and pay such trifles as servants' wages, postage stamps, and travelling expenses, for which credit cannot be obtained.

When Olive refused her son Mrs. Stuart was in despair. Gentle and sweet-tempered as the girl had shown herself, Mrs. Stuart felt her decision was final. A skilful tampering with letters had informed her that one trustee had started on a long sea voyage, while the other was spending a month's holiday in Switzerland. The widow knew perfectly well that the return of Mr. Ross would be the signal for Olive leaving her. The girl would either tell her guardian that she was unhappy at Lindenhurst, or confide to him Maxwell's persecution; in any case, he would promptly remove his ward.

Mrs. Stuart and her hopeful son had a long private conference; Maxwell had seen old Mr. Jenkins' will, and thus knew that whatever happened the interest of the money was Olive's for life; he had nothing to gain by conciliating the trustees, nothing to fear from their opposition.

Once Olive was his wife he would have a right to share her income of nearly two thousand a year.

The picnic to Vale Leston was Mrs. Stuart's idea, but she had first to study the time-table carefully to be sure there was no possible way of Olive's returning to Deepdale, and she even sent Maxwell to make enquiries at the village to ascertain there was no one there with a horse and trap for hire capable of driving thirty miles.

This secured, the Churtions were taken freely into confidence, that is they were told Olive was engaged to Maxwell, but a lovers' quarrel had parted them, and the girl obstinately refused to see him; the picnic, Mrs. Stuart urged, would give the dear boy a chance of explaining things; his attentions to Miss Churton in the early part of the day would arouse Olive's jealousy, and

towards evening he was to try and obtain his fiancée's forgiveness.

To the noisy, good natured Churtions it was delightful to think of assisting to put things straight, and they entered into the scheme enthusiastically.

Mrs. Stuart herself put Olive's watch half an hour slow, having the good luck to find it on the dressing table; she borrowed the ten shillings purposely, knowing perfectly that Miss Smith was carrying very little money in her purse.

Everything was planned out skillfully; Maxwell had even engaged two rooms at the Vale Leston "Railway Arms," for "himself and a young lady."

Mrs. Stuart, who knew the world thoroughly, felt that Olive would be so terribly compromised nothing could put her straight with Mrs. Grundy but an early marriage with Maxwell.

Once married to him Olive would have to make the best of her husband, and Mrs. Stuart thought privately she would gain a great deal by the match; if she had money Max had birth, good looks, and great talents. The doting mother was utterly blind to her son's worthlessness, and could not understand how cruelly she was wronging Olive.

And but for the maid Allen, the cruel plot might have succeeded; not in marrying Olive to a man she despised, the girl had too strong a will for that, but in bringing a shadow on her name it would have taken years to remove.

Allen, however, was very much attached to the young heiress, and more than two months in Mrs. Stuart's family having taught her a little of that lady's character, she was quick to act on her sister's warning; and reading between the lines of Kate's letter, she formed a pretty good idea of some danger to her young lady; but beyond trying to detain Olive at home she could do nothing, till the lucky discovery in Maxwell's bedroom put the clue into her hands.

To a girl brought up in almost feudal reverence for the Cheviot family, to go to Sir Norman with such a tale of his aunt and cousin was an awful effort; besides Norman was so grave and reserved that he was regarded as far more unapproachable than his mother and sister; but Allen brought her courage to the point and started for the Court.

Nothing could exceed Sir Norman's kindness; the only point they differed on was the one of Allen's accompanying him to Vale Leston; however the girl gained her end, persevering in her purpose because, though she would not have hinted such a thing to the baronet, if when they found Miss Smith there was no train for anywhere from Vale Leston, it would be nearly as awkward for the young lady to be left alone with him, in the eyes of the world as with his escape-cousin.

Mrs. Stuart reached Deepdale Road unconscious of the defeat awaiting her plans; she never saw Sir Norman peering out of the tiny waiting room, so close to her that he heard the mocking remark "she hoped the lovers hadn't eloped;" she never saw the maid Allen closely veiled, and only waiting till the pic-nic party had disappeared to join him.

"I suppose it's all right," Mrs. Churton said to her friend, "and they'll come on by the next train."

Mrs. Stuart never said there was no "next train," till morning; she only answered carelessly,

"Oh, yes, perfectly right, Maxwell will take the greatest care of Olive, and as they are so soon to spend their lives together, I don't see that an hour or two alone with each other can 'hurt them now."

The Court brougham was standing outside as she and Charlotte passed through the door of the station; the coachman touched his hat. The Stuarts were pretty well detested by Sir Norman's servants, but, from loyalty to their master, these never failed in respect to his relations.

"Goodness, Drake!" said Mrs. Stuart; "what brings you here? Nothing the matter, I hope?"

"My master has gone to Westbourne by the last train, ma'am; I believe my lady sent for him. Shall I drive you and Miss Charlotte to Lindenhurst, ma'am? I'm just going back."

Mrs. Stuart accepted gladly ; but when they were safely esconced in the brougham, she said to her daughter,—

"I wonder what your aunt could have wanted. I hope Helen is not worse."

"Nell is very well ; I had a letter from her yesterday, mamma. Norman will pass Vale Leston."

"The train is not likely to stop," retorted her mother ; "besides, Olive won't spend the night on the platform ; your brother will take better care of her than that."

A nice fire burnt in Mrs. Stuart's bedroom, and supper was ready downstairs. Feeling tired, she thought she might as well enjoy the assistance of a maid, and told Lottie to fetch Allen to brush her hair and put away her things."

Miss Stuart soon came back.

"Allen isn't in, mother ; she went out about six and has not come back. She told Jane, Olive had said she should not want her to-night."

"Olive is a great deal too independent," purred Mrs. Stuart. "I shall take her down a peg or two when she is my daughter-in-law."

"Will they live here?" asked Lottie, curiously.

"Not likely. Dear Max always hated this dead-and-alive hole. I expect they will take a furnished flat in London—for the present, at all events."

Mrs. Stuart did not hurry up the next morning ; she was tired from her exertions, and only entered the dining-room at nine o'clock. Breakfast was brought in, and she and Lottie still lingered over it, when a thundering knock at the front door announced an arrival, and two minutes later Maxwell came in, with a wild, haggard look on his weak, handsome face, and anger gleaming in his eyes.

"You've done for us," he said savagely to his mother, when he had carefully closed the door. "There'll be a pretty piece of work over this business ! You'll remember, please, it was your idea, not mine."

"Maxwell ! What on earth do you mean ? Where is Olive ?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"But surely you met her, and——?"

"I acted your little comedy to perfection," he said, with a sneer. "I walked to the station with Olive ; nice and sulky she was, too. That girl has the devil of a temper. We got into the booking-office at half past eight."

"And then ?"

"Oh, for a long time she sulked, and wouldn't speak a word ; then she wanted me to get a carriage and drive her home. I told her it was impossible, and she settled herself on a bench on the platform and declared she'd stay there all night. It was beastly cold, and I went across to the inn to get a glass of ale just to keep me going ; and I thought I might as well order supper, for I knew she'd have to give in sooner or later. I wasn't gone a quarter of an hour, and when I came back there was no trace of Olive."

Mrs. Stuart looked at him in blank dismay. This was worse than she had bargained for.

"You don't think"—and, hard-hearted as she was, the widow's voice did tremble at this idea—"you don't think she committed suicide ?"

"Not she. When I got back they were locking up the station for the night. A porter told me he had noticed the young lady, and advised her to sit on the other side, as it was more sheltered. He noticed her just before the down train came in, and, as she was gone when it left the station, he concluded she got into it."

"She had only sixpence in her pocket ; that wouldn't take her far."

"That must have been the Westbourne train," said Lottie, her dull brain grasping the fact which had eluded her mother. "Norman was in it ; he caught sight of her, and has taken her to Aunt Maude."

Mother and son exchanged glances.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Max, bitterly ; "he was always a meddlesome fellow."

"She will make out a nice tale against us," sobbed Mrs. Stuart. "Max, my boy, we are ruined !"

"I don't know that her being with the Cheviots is worse than her being wandering about alone," said Max, prosaically. "From the moment I found

her gone I knew the game was up. It will be rather better for you if that lawyer comes down prying here to be able to say Miss Smith is with your sister-in-law, Lady Maude Cheviot. Middle-class people think no end of a title."

"And you——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The game's up," he said bitterly ; "we tried our best to win the heiress, but she was a bit too sharp for us. There's only one thing for it, mother. Give out to the servants you are going to Westbourne. Pack everything belonging to you, and let's off to France. You can live very comfortably on your pension in Boulogne, and you'll find it a sight livelier than Lindenhurst."

"But, my debts," groaned the widow ; "and that bill I signed for you ?"

"Well, you can't pay them ; so you'll have to leave them," said her son, whose morality was rather lax.

"But won't they come after me, and put me in prison ?"

"Norman Cheviot's a mean beggar, but I don't think he'd let his father's sister go to prison !" said Max. "How much do you owe, in round numbers, old lady ?"

"About nine hundred pounds."

"Ah, and that bill of mine is another four. Well, write a letter to Norman, telling him that you are willing to give up your life interest in Lindenhurst, on the understanding that he pays your debts and hands you over a thousand pounds."

"He wouldn't do it."

"I think he would. He has such bad taste as to prefer our room to our company, and with Lindenhurst given up, we shall have no inducement to settle here."

"I meant he wouldn't trust me with the money ; he did give me fifty pounds once to pay a—pressing bill, and I sent it to you."

"Well, let him settle with the creditors down here himself, so that he hands you the thousand intact."

"When shall I write to him ?"

"Oh, I'd let a day or two pass ; we ought to know for certain that the rich Miss Smith is in his august mother's charge."

And they knew it the next afternoon when Mr. Vernon, the junior partner of the legal firm who had managed the Cheviot affairs for years, called at Lindenhurst and demanded an interview with Mrs. Stuart.

The widow stipulated that her son should be present.

The lawyer went to the point at once.

"Sir Norman knows your conspiracy against Miss Smith, and intends to lay the matter before her trustees ; but he is willing, for his father's sake, not to blazon the matter abroad among your friends, on condition that you leave Southshire at once. He will advance two thousand pounds, provided you sign a deed resigning your life interest in Lindenhurst ; and so long as you remain not less than fifty miles away from Deepdale, he will pay the rent of any house you like to select up to a hundred a year."

Maxwell winked at his mother, and she understood the signal.

"I think the terms cruel," she said, fretfully, forgetting she had meant to propose a compact far less liberal. "But my nephew is a rich baronet and I am a poor widow, so I suppose he must have his way."

"The deed will be ready for your signature in a week," said Mr. Vernon ; "and I am empowered to hand you over the money when you have left Lindenhurst, and the keys are in the possession of Sir Norman's agent. For many reasons Sir Norman desires that the deed should be signed and the money paid in London."

Within a fortnight of the picnic Lindenhurst was deserted, and the Stuarts had crossed the Channel ; not till then did Sir Norman insert an advertisement directing that all claims against his aunt should be sent to his solicitors. They were paid in full.

And thus far Mrs. Stuart was a free woman, only she knew perfectly if Miss Smith's guardians chose they could bring a most terrible charge against her.

(Continued on page 549.)

THE SECRETS AND SHADOWS OF CASTLEGRANGE.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

It seemed very odd at first and difficult to realise, this most undreamed-of meeting with Bertie Wilford and Mr. Aragon ; and yet it was not long ere we found ourselves strolling leisurely away from the forest lodge and towards the romantic house on wheels then stationary upon the edge of the neighbouring ride.

"I should have known you anywhere, Hebe," Bertie had cried, in the old frank, boyish manner I remembered so well ; "although your frocks are long now, and you do up your hair in the latest style. Really and truly, to look at, you have not altered much since the dear old dead-and-gone days at Thorpe. Have I, do you think ?" said he, laughing ; Mrs. Sampson's second loaf now wrapped in that morning's *Daily Telegraph* and tucked comfortably under his left arm, his soft sombrero pushed backward from his smooth tanned forehead.

I looked at him, at first shyly, smiling dubiously in answer—with a shyness which I had never known when Bertie and I were boy and girl together. Certainly, I thought, he had grown into a remarkably handsome young man ; tall and slim and limber as an Athenian athlete of ancient times ; with his dark-blue eyes, his curly fair hair and young golden moustache, and his brilliant complexion which, in spite of its wholesome tan, many a plain woman, I decided, must have grudged him in her time.

From Bertie I glanced furtively at Mr. Aragon.

The now successful and lionized painter looked a trifle older and leaner, a trifle more sombre of aspect perhaps, than had looked the struggling drawing-master on that memorable day when he had joined us in our picnic on the shore under the cliffs.

Yes ; the thin brown Vandyke-ish face, with the quiet observant eyes deep-seated beneath their dusky straight brows, and with the heavy growth of hair upon the upper lip, the long feathered ends of which, I remembered, had blown about his shoulders in the fresh sea wind—the face of this man, I say, looked just a little more tired and indifferent, a little more weary of the world and its ways ; and that, I think, was really the only noticeable change in the outward form of George Aragon, who still was a young man in years as the ages of men are reckoned.

As soon as I had recovered from the first effects of the surprise, I introduced Felicia Luck to the two men. Bertie, of course, through my letters, was already familiarised with the name of Felicia ; and she was now in her sprightly vein chatting to them both at once, quite indeed as if she had known them intimately all her life !

I heard her with wonderment and admiration combined—what an enviable thing it was, I reflected, to be so vivacious and so self possessed, no matter what the circumstances in which one might happen to find oneself !

Mr. Aragon, quiet and unruffled as of yore, said little ; responded to Felicia's sallies monosyllabically, if at all. But I noticed that whenever he fancied he was unobserved by any of us, his deep unsmiling eyes would be turned upon Felicia Luck with a curious, searching intentness of vision, the reason of which it was impossible to conceive.

Yet, after all, was it possib'e, I wondered, that the two had ever met before ? No—it could not be, I determined the next moment. Had it been so, I should have heard of the circumstance from Felicia herself. The notion was ridiculous, and I dismissed it forthwith.

Felicia was telling Bertie how we had seen him and his friend on the evening before ; and what a scare we had had, believing them to be gypsies ; and how our errand to the lodge that morning had been expressly to instruct the people who lived there, the keeper Sampson and his wife, to turn them at once off the place !

Bertie pretended to be very indignant.

"Gypsies and vagabonds, Miss Luck ! Really

you astonish me. I should have imagined that our swagger little house on wheels presented a decidedly better all round appearance than that of a beggarly ramshackle common old gipsy-van!"

Felicia shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, I don't know," said she nonchalantly. "Here and there, I fancy, I have more than once come across a really nice clean gipsy-van, and quite as smart as yours. And last night, you must recollect, it was dusk when we saw you under the trees. You frightened us horribly. Did you see us run?"

"Run! Rather! Two regular Atalantas—one in a black gown and one in a white. We guessed pretty shrewdly, though, who you were; but you gave us no opportunity of declaring ourselves. You vanished like a couple of rabbits down a burrow, don't you know."

"Surely no marvel in the circumstances," rejoined Felicia, laughing. "How were we to know that you were not running after us?"

"You might have sent us word, Bertie, that you intended to visit the neighbourhood of Castlegrange," I here put in, in accents of friendly reproach. "It would have been but civil—and it wouldn't have been much trouble."

"Well, you see, Hebe, we wanted to give you a big surprise," explained Bertie simply.

"So far, I think, you have succeeded in your aim," was Felicia's comment then.

"A big, downright, delightful surprise, don't you know?" added Bertie emphatically.

"H'm," said Felicia Luck, with a queer twinkle in her Alice-like eyes.

Bertie glanced at her quickly and saw it.

"My two last letters, Bertie, you didn't answer at all," I continued resentfully. "You are not worth letters—you are the worst correspondent alive!"

"Now you mention it, Hebe, I do believe I am," he confessed ingenuously. "But, you see, for some time past, it has been like this."

And he proceeded to remind us that just now in town they were in the very thick of the London season; and he and Aragon, in consequence, had been out and about of late a very great deal—long way too much; what time, in fact, should have been devoted to correspondence with old friends had been spent instead in answering notes and cards of invitation, and so forth.

Bertie, said Bertie, with an air of wisdom, late hours, crowded hot reception rooms, theatres, balls, and all such haunts of the feather-brained fashionable multitude, whose "turning in" time was just about the hour when sensible healthy folk were thinking of "turning out," meant simply ruination, moral suicide, in the long run, for the career of the conscientious artist—let him be who he might, either author or painter, if it came to that.

No man, Bertie maintained, could work with clear cool head and swift sure hand in the day, if he was fool enough to riot and caper throughout the night, one's legitimate recuperative hours, until the working day began again.

It was the proverbial burning of the candle at both ends; and "that sort of game"—at all events, for the artistic temperament—had never yet answered, and never would. Disaster, sooner or later, in such a course, was inevitable.

Having arrived at this sapient conclusion, Bertie, it seemed, had had no difficulty whatever in persuading his friend George Aragon "to cut the whole show" in company with himself. Indeed Aragon, as it happened, was only too glad of an excuse to do this.

God made the country, Bertie reminded us, and man made the town; and given a glorious summer, such as the present, what spot or region upon the face of the broad earth was in any wise comparable to the country nooks and corners of fair old England in the green midsummer months of the year?

Remembering the days of his youth, Bertie said gravely, and the healthsome joys of the covered cart, it had ever been a strong desire of his heart to become the proprietor of a real commodious house on wheels, in which to travel leisurely about the country, gipsy-fashion, whithersoever his fancy tended; and now behold,

while he was yet young and able to enjoy life, the fond dream was realised—and realised to perfection!

He had had the caravan built and furnished after a careful model of his own drawing; had bought a serviceable stout quadruped without an atom of vice in him; and then he and George Aragon, turning their backs upon the garish town and its follies, had together set off, with a sense of indescribable freedom and relief, for a regular lotos-eating, pastoral holiday, as Bertie called it.

First of all, they had gone jogging away south to Thorpe, and seen the white-haired old pastor, Bertie's father, at home in his quiet Sussex parsonage. Then they had gone on and looked up Prudence Best at Lea Cottage, and thereby made the gaunt old woman stare considerably. And then they had thought that they would jog back by easy stages and make their way westward on a voyage of discovery, and so find out Waybridge and Castlegrange.

Had not Mr. Tressillian himself indeed, when at The Lea six years ago, by word of mouth invited him—Bertie Wilford—to come and make himself free of the place; park, house, forest, anywhere; should sketching or painting business ever, at any future time, land him in the neighbourhood of Castlegrange?

He had only taken Mr. Tressillian at his word, said he; that was all. Moreover he was impatient—longing, so he declared—to see *me*, Hebe Fairburn, once more; the "dear little play-fellow" and "chum" of his boyhood's days; and—well, *voilà!* there they were, were they not!—caravan, noble steed, and all—comfortably brought to an encampment in the glades of Castlegrange!

By the bye, if happy accident had not thrown us together that morning, he and Aragon would probably have been down at the house some time during the day, formally to call on us girls and Mr. Tressillian, and to explain the reason of their trespassing upon the Castlegrange domain.

Then Bertie went on to speak of their pictures, his own and his friend's, which figured prominently that season at the Royal Academy and elsewhere; and I somehow found the courage to try and congratulate Mr. Aragon upon the splendid success he had achieved and the world's acclaim which had inevitably followed it.

As I spoke I caught him staring moodily again at Felicia Luck; and he replied to my shy but well-meant efforts with a brief conventional phrase or two and a thoughtful smile.

Bertie was telling Felicia what a jolly, healthy, free-of-all-care sort of life it was—this untrammelled roaming about in a house on wheels; shaking up their own beds, preparing and cooking their own meals, and washing up the plates and dishes afterwards.

Then, too, it was the greatest fun imaginable, buying provisions and things at the shops in the different towns and villages through which they passed. Sometimes, of course, there was a lot of linen and stuff to be sent to a laundress; and at these times it was their custom to put up at some wayside inn, and to sojourn pleasantly there until the job was done.

Felicia said that it must indeed be all very delightful and charming and novel; and that she some day or other must taste of the pleasures of life as lived in a wandering caravan.

And were they idle all day long, she wanted to know, and did they never draw and paint, or anything! Oh yes, indeed, Bertie earnestly assured her—they worked occasionally when the fit was on them; in fact, they were going to "lug out" the easels and try to do some work that very morning—picking up occasionally a lovely bit of landscape here, a still lovelier bit there, an exquisite dawn or a dream perhaps in the way of sunsets somewhere else.

Castlegrange, the grand forest scenery round which they expected would prove as a veritable mine of wealth to them; they had seen nothing more truly beautiful of its kind for many a long day, either at home or abroad. But they were taking a holiday—resting—recruiting, now, Felicia must understand.

So chatting on discursively as we strolled over the thymy sward, which in the shadow yet

glistened with a myriad liquid diamonds, we arrived presently at the smart caravan stationary there beneath the cool-spreading boughs of the forest oaks.

Bertie Wilford exclaimed jubilantly, running up the step-ladder:

"I say, you must come in now that you are here. You must come in for a minute, and just see the interior of our swagger little house on wheels!"

And Mr. Aragon himself politely seconded the invitation.

But just then it was dimly occurring to me that this proceeding on our part would scarcely in the circumstances be a correct and maidenly one—at moment's notice, as it were, thus boldly to invade and inspect this movable bachelor dwelling!

We were alone, chaperon-less; Mr. Tressillian, in ignorance of the real character of his visitors, was away in London. No! I felt surer every minute that it would not be exactly the right thing to do in Julian's absence; and so, in answer to Bertie's genial proposal, I murmured something—I know not what—to that effect.

Felicia, who had read my mind, was generous enough to help me and not ridicule my scruples. She had abundant tact and sense when she chose.

"No; not to-day," she put in, demurely. "We'll just take a peep now, if you like, and come again another time."

"I vote, then, that you come up here tomorrow, and have afternoon tea with us," suggested Bertie hospitably. "Will you? Do?"

"An excellent idea," observed Mr. Aragon, with that rare smile of his brightening for an instant his lean brown face.

"And I say, Hebe; get Mr. Tressillian to accompany you if you can," Bertie added. "Since he is in town, and we have had the good fortune to meet you this morning, we won't call to-day. We will wait till he returns to Castlegrange—see?"

Hearing and recognising the voices of the two men, out from the caravan had sprung the collie-dog, which we had heard and seen on the previous evening. The handsome, faithful creature, all glossy silken black, cream white, and golden tan, made straight for George Aragon his master—leaped roughly upward, placing his strong paws upon the painter's breast, and rapidly and lovingly licking his face.

Mr. Aragon stroked and patted the dog; and spoke more words to the animal indeed, soft words of endearment and approval, than we girls ourselves had been favoured with throughout our stroll to the van he guarded.

"What is his name?" I asked. Felicia, never too fond of four-footed beasts, as she said, was peering meanwhile inquisitively into the caravan.

"Presto. I reared him myself from very early puppyhood, Miss Fairburn, three years ago. He's the best watch-dog and the dearest companion in the world—ain't you, Presto old chap?"

Presto declared boisterously that it was true, and made the forest ring again with his vociferous reiterated.

"Quiet, sir—quiet!" Mr. Aragon commanded; and Presto straightway, almost as if shot, dropped heavily at the painter's feet, and thwacked the turf at intervals with his fine bushy tail, the while gazing steadily upward at his master's face with hanging red tongue and beautiful fond eyes.

"Felicia dear, we really ought to be going homeward," I meanwhile had called to her. "You forget that we have to drive into Waybridge for those embroidery silks you want."

"Oh, bother the silks!" cried Felicia lightly, laughing and nodding in farewell to Bertie, who had by this time deposited his loaf within the miniature pantry—in reality a hanging safe—of the caravan.

A few minutes afterwards we had said "au revoir" to the two men, who had accompanied us as far as the brow of the hill—they would not hear of "good-bye"—and had promised them that we would come up to the ride for afternoon tea on the morrow; that was, of course, to say,

should we find later on that Mr. Tressillian had no objection to the arrangement.

"I love a house on wheels!" exclaimed Felicia, as we descended the valley path—"and if mine be ever the good luck to marry a man rich enough to indulge my modest whims, why, my husband shall take me for the honeymoon in a gipsy-van. As I live, he shall! Oh, Hebe sweet, in theirs up yonder"—suddenly looking over her shoulder and waving her hand coquettishly to Bertie and Mr. Aragon, who still stood watching us there from the green hill-top—"in theirs, do you know, there are two sort-of-double-up chairs; a charming little cooking-stove with nice bright little fire and all; some cupboards with crockery and that; heaps of painting things, easels and so forth, stowed away in a corner; two or three dear little pictures on the walls—gods they looked, but I'm no judge; a couple of easy-chairs, also of the double-up sort; some pots and pans on a rack; slippers and boots lying about; any amount of books, yellow-backed novels and magazines and newspapers, lying about too—the whole interior, by the way, smelling delightfully tobacco-y—a lovely wild-beast skin or two upon the floor; two portmanteaus, one unstrapped and open, and the other not; a looking-glass in a carved wood frame; syphons of soda-water or something; a brandy-bottle; a whiskey-bottle; a boot-jack; a big—"

But here I stopped her.

"Oh, Felicia!" cried I, rather shocked, "you must have stared in very rudely, I am afraid, to see and remember so much! Surely it was—it was—er—er—well, just a trifling indelicate of you, dear, to say the least—was it not?"

Here Felicia, in her turn, checked me.

"I used my eyes, darling—yes," said she, unabashed—"if you mean that? I meant to, bless you! when I had the opportunity. Why not?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

ACTING on Felicia's advice, we said nothing at all to Mrs. Vasper, when we met her at luncheon, with reference to our visitors and their caravan in the north ride.

What would be the use! She, we well knew beforehand, would take a jaundiced, bigoted view of the whole affair; would tacitly if not overtly condemn Mr. Aragon and Bertie for their unconventional mode of enjoying a summer holiday, and Felicia and me for our venturing, "unprotected," to visit these bold bachelors at their preposterous house on wheels.

So we decided to maintain a discreet silence on the matter until my kinsman Julian should return from town.

Then, said Felicia—for again it was her own idea—we would observe in his presence, in an off-hand, accidental sort of way, that we were after all completely mistaken about "those gypsies," and that the caravan in the forest had, to our amazement, turned out to be a quite superior thing of its kind—in fact was no less than the temporary summer abode of two old friends; "two old friends of yours, that is, Hebe, you understand," explained Felicia parenthetically; who were amusing themselves by jogging about the country in true vagabond fashion, and who, knowing something of its residents and wishing to know more of the neighbourhood, had called at Castlegrange.

This then at first was our harmless little plan; but it was destined to be upset a few hours later, and in the end came to naught.

Just before dinner, when Felicia and I, dressed, were in the baronial hall—which, with its heterogeneous collection of furniture and its wealth of subdued colour, we preferred at all times to the great chill state drawing-room—awaiting the appearance of Mrs. Vasper, and wondering what it could be that made Mr. Tressillian so late, a telegram from Julian was brought to Castlegrange.

It had been despatched from the Lancaster Hotel and sent to Mrs. Vasper; and it informed us that Mr. Tressillian was detained by business in town and would not be home until the following day.

Almost concurrently we heard the sound of wheels passing under the old ivied archway. The carriage, it appeared, had gone to the station to meet Julian, and had now returned empty, without him.

"Even in the telegram he does not say at what hour he will arrive home to-morrow," commented Felicia, in a vexed tone, and with a glance full of meaning at me.

"True—he does not," answered Mrs. Vasper frigidly. "I cannot however see why the circumstance should in any wise concern you, Miss Luck. Mr. Tressillian, I presume, can very well hire from Waybridge at whatever hour of the day he may arrive there."

"Oh, I suppose he can!" rejoined Felicia nonchalantly. "I don't think I said—did I!—that he could not. Cat!" she added under her breath.

"Dinner has been announced," said Mrs. Vasper more icily still, gliding across the great hall as she spoke. "Possibly, you prefer cold soup, Miss Luck?"

"Possibly, you are wrong, Mrs. Vasper," replied Felicia, with an unrefined baseness of men that somehow, I am sure, was far more rasping to the nerves of Mrs. Vasper than open impertinence from the same quarter would have been. "I love my dinner like a glutton! I shudder at the mere notion of cold soup!"

And she skipped in the wake of the gliding short black-satin gown, grimacing wickedly at the back of Mrs. Vasper's narrow drab head as she followed her into the dining-room.

By noon next day there was no Mr. Tressillian; and after luncheon—at which meal, as it happened, for some reason or other connected with Miss Knowles, Mrs. Vasper was not present—we went up to our sitting-room in the tower.

In one of the upstairs passages we met Danvers the valet, who stood aside respectfully to allow us to pass. I thought insensibly at the time that he looked more like a sleek, grave, country attorney than ever.

Felicia pounced upon him directly and said,—

"Ah—you! Perhaps you can tell us whether or not any other telegram has been received from Mr. Tressillian? Since last evening, I mean?"

"I believe not, madam. If there had been, I should have heard of it," Danvers replied.

When we were in the tower-boudoir, Felicia said crossly, in continuation of an argument which had been begun and carried on with some warmth, on both sides, between us downstairs,—

"I've half a mind, I declare, to go alone, then. That I have!"

"Do," I returned quietly. "It would be most becoming."

"I call it the acme of absurdity," she fumed, pacing to and fro as she talked, "your refusing to go up to the caravan this afternoon; particularly after your promising them that you would do so, and when they will of course be prepared for our visit and all—just because your paragon of a guardian, or whatever he calls himself, happens to be away from home. Pooh!—he wouldn't mind, I know!"

She abruptly changed her contemptuous tone to a cooing, wheedling one, and dropped upon her knees by the couch I was sitting on.

"Now, Hebe, ducky darling pet, say that you'll come; and if he is angry about it by and by—and really, you know, it is nonsense to imagine such a thing—why, I'll take the consequences cheerfully, every bit of the blame, and make it all straight for us both in the end. There!"

"It is of no earthly use, Felicia," I said, as firmly as I could—"your kneeling there. I promised that we would come if Julian himself should have no objection to our coming. As he is not here to decide the question for us, either one way or the other, we must stay at home—that is how I see it. We can easily send a groom or a stable-lad or somebody, and let them know by a note or a message. Besides, Bertie hoped that Mr. Tressillian would himself accompany us; and so, you see, that—"

"Oh, Hebe!" pleaded Felicia reproachfully. "I could not have believed that your heart was

so hard! To disappoint two such old friends, in this deliberate, cold-blooded manner—"

I held up my hand.

"Bertie Wilford only is an old friend—you forget," I reminded her—"I know nothing of Mr. Aragon. He, comparatively speaking, is a stranger to me. Felicia, it is impossible to reason with you in this mood; for you choose to be wilfully blind to the true aspect of the situation. It would not be seemly—and you know it as well as I—for us two girls alone together, with neither Julian nor Mrs. Vasper nor any body to accompany us, and without my kinsman's knowledge into the bargain, to go up to the north ride this afternoon and have tea in the caravan with those two men. They themselves would be the very last to expect such a thing of us, if they knew how matters had turned out since yesterday."

"I know that you are an abominable little prude, if I know nothing else!" exclaimed Felicia, now jumping up angrily from her suppliant attitude and marching away to the open window.

At that instant we heard someone moving about in a farther room; Felicia's dressing-room.

Felicia Luck was the untidiest of girls; she would toss her garments anywhere; and neat Selina Ann was just then engaged in tidying a chaotic wardrobe.

It was at that very instant, too, that there occurred to Felicia what she afterwards described as one of her finest inspirations.

She flew straightway into the dressing-room; seized Selina Ann by the arm; shook her severely because she stared so; and then said eagerly,—

"Selina Ann, would you like to go out to tea this afternoon?"

Poor Selina Ann, in her astonishment, could only stare harder than ever, repeating with a dazed air Felicia's own impetuous words,—

"Lor', miss; would I like to go out to tea? Where to—what for?"

"Yes, yes, yes, girl! Out to tea!" cried Felicia, in her headlong way—"to meet two nice gentlemen in a gipsy-van, along with Miss Fairburn and me."

This was too much, even for our ordinarily well-behaved Selina Ann. In spite of herself, she began to grin.

"Lor', Miss Luck, what a one you are for a joke, to be sure!" said she. "Just as if I could believe—"

But Miss Luck stopped her then and there; assuring Selina Ann, in the most solemn way, that she—Felicia—had never been more in earnest in her life.

And then Felicia volunteered a hurried explanation; and Selina Ann gradually comprehended what was so urgently required of her that afternoon; and it ended by her being dragged forward by the arm into the boudoir where I still sat, and standing there, it must be admitted, rather inclined to giggle, before me, with the indomitable Felicia by her side.

"Here," exclaimed she, triumphantly—"here is the necessary, the imperative sacrifice to the prejudices of Mrs. Grundy! Selina Ann, the neat-handed, the invaluable, shall go with us, in the character of our sheep-dog and to play property. If we visit these bold bad men with our abigail at our tails, Mr. Tressillian cannot cavil; old mother Vasper cannot cavil; nobody in his senses can cavil. Listen now, Selina Ann! Make yourself nice and spruce with your Sunday gown and bonnet by four o'clock—sharp—if you please; and hold yourself in readiness to go with Miss Fairburn and me to take tea in the gentlemen's gipsy-van!"

Thus Felicia contrived adroitly to get her own way; and having got it, she forthwith recovered her temper and the bright high spirits which were natural to it.

"Confess now," said she, "that you would have been disappointed—quite too awfully disappointed—if I had not discovered a way out of our difficulty!"

And truth compelled me to own, however reluctantly, that she was right.

Attended by the sedate and well-mannered



"NOW, HEBE, DUCKY DARLING PET SAY THAT YOU'LL COME," SAID FELICIA IN HER MOST AGREABLE MANNER.

Selina Ann—who evinced much interest in our adventure when I informed her that the younger of the two gentlemen whom she would presently see was the one I had known long ago at Thorpe—surely we were safe from the frowns of Mrs. Grundy; surely we were doing naught that might give pain or offence to Julian!

Felicia put on her best black gown but one; I put on my white merino with the primrose ribbons; and then we went out into Dame Lucy's garden and looked for some sweet old-world flower or other to wear at one's bosom or waist.

Felicia found some white clematis; and I gathered a spray of the wild-honeysuckle which wreathed and almost smothered the ancient sundial there.

Thus adorned, and followed by Selina Ann in her Sunday bonnet and gown, according to Felicia's instructions, a few minutes after four o'clock we started for the north ride.

It was a perfect afternoon; one of June's liveliest; and the shade and the cool rustling of the great old forest trees were, on such a day, as grateful to our senses as they appeared to be to those of the harmless drowsy cattle lying about in the park.

But it was warm work climbing the valley hill; and Selina Ann's round moon-face, poor thing, soon became the colour of a poppy in August.

Felicia and I carried our large lace sunshades, and Selina Ann had hoisted her umbrella.

We found the two men, when at last we arrived at their encampment on the fringe of the forest, looking delightfully cool and picturesque in flannels. Mr. Aragon's, as Felicia's quick eyes remarked at once, were all white; whilst those donned by the volatile Bertie had in them faint stripes of rainbow hues.

"Vain young man," said she scornfully—"I said that he was conceited—did I not?—even before I knew him! My preconception of him, Hebe, you see, was fated to be verified. Ha, ha!"

"Now I shall tell him what you say," I said solemnly—just to frighten her a little for her pains.

"Oh, gracious—don't! No, no, no! You shall not, Hebe! I forbid—"

Here they caught sight of us, rising above the hill-top line—Venus fashion from the foam, as Felicia whispered nonsensically—to the level glade beyond; and Bertie, with greeting outstretched hands, came running over the sward to meet us.

"Welcome, Hebe—welcome, Miss Luck," he cried, as boyishly as ever. "How d'y'e do! Do you know, I was just beginning to despair of your putting in an appearance after all, and was thinking of rushing down to the house to fetch you, whether you would or no. 'Pon my word I was."

"Well, to tell you the truth, it positively has been what I fancy you would call, in pure Johnsonian English, 'a near shave,'" said Felicia archly, taking upon herself to explain things to Bertie before I could do so myself—"it was all but settled, indeed, that we should stop at home."

And she told Bertie glibly about Mr. Tressilian's being detained in town, and how I myself had flatly declined to budge from Castlegrave unaccompanied by either guardian or chaperon, to take care of us in the lions' den!

"Had it been a question of all sorts of Bacchanalian extravagances in a pagan grove, instead of a simple cup of tea with friends in a pleasant wood near home, Hebe could not have made more fuss over the matter," declared Felicia sweetly.

"And whom have we here, then?" inquired Bertie, in a low tone, smiling somewhat quizzically, I noticed, as he took a sidelong glance at Selina Ann standing there modestly in the background with flaming sun-scorched cheeks and downcast eyes.

"That," replied Felicia serenely, with a sort of vague introductory wave of the hand, "is our

good Selina Ann—our most convenient Selina Ann, I may say on this occasion—Hebe's maid, don't you know, at Castlegrave."

"How d'y'e do, Selina Ann?" said genial Bertie, nodding.

"Quite well, thank you, sir," said flaming Selina Ann, curteeing.

"And her mission, her business here with us, you understand," Felicia ended mockingly, "is to see that we do not get into mischief. To look at, Mr. Wilford, we are two artless unsophisticated young creatures enough; but in reality we are dangerous—we are not to be trusted!"

(To be continued.)

The habit of opium smoking has attained considerable dimensions in Australia; and Victoria, following the tradition of paternal government, has been the first of the colonies to take the matter into consideration. A bill is at present before the Legislature with the following regulations as to the importation and use of opium. Licenses must be obtained for the importation of the drug, and it may only in future be used for medicinal purposes. No ship is to be allowed to enter any Victorian port with more than 50lb. weight of opium on board, under penalties ranging from £25 to £500. Importers will only be permitted to sell this to medical practitioners, chemists, members of the College of Veterinary Surgeons, or licensed persons, and records are ordered to be kept of the disposal of all importations. The use of opium, except for medicinal purposes, is made henceforth a penal offence, and the growing or manufacturing of the same is likewise interdicted in Victoria. It will further be held in the power of the Governor in Council to prohibit the importation or sale of any medicine which contains an undue proportion of the drug, and full power is granted for making all necessary regulations to annihilate the opium-smoking evil now existent in the colony.



THE THREE MEN WATCHED MAURICE DOUGLAS WITH EXPECTANT FACES.

TWO GIRLS.

—:—

CHAPTER III.

GLADYS KEITH woke the morning after her double loss with a strange awed sense of something having happened. Very soon, poor girl, it all came back to her.

The two, from whom she had never received anything but kindness, were lying downstairs in their last still sleep; and amid the sudden desolation caused by their death, she was yet conscious of a new sense of joy, since Maurice Douglas loved her and had asked her to be his wife.

Mrs. Hawkins, the old housekeeper, ministered to her young lady with tender care, and by ten o'clock Gladys was downstairs in her aunt's boudoir.

Her eyes filled with tears as she realised that the kindly mistress of the pretty room would never enter it again.

She was so strangely alone, this girl of twenty, whom every one believed a great heiress.

She had come to Diamond End a little child of five. She had made no intimate friends except the neighbours who lived within a few miles radius, and even of these no one was on very confidential terms with her.

Mrs. Tudor had been rather jealous of her niece's affections, and the result was that, though good old Hawkins and his wife had racked their brains, they could think of no one whom their young lady would care to see in this her hour of trial.

Gladys wore a soft white dress with a black sash. She looked a beautiful specimen of English girlhood: one fair enough to keep a lover true in spite of a lost fortune.

"There's been a telegram, my dear," said the housekeeper, with an odd mingling of respect and affection. "Mr. and Mrs. Keith will be here this afternoon."

Gladys flushed nervously. She knew perfectly that her uncle Robert and his wife had bitterly

resented the Tudors' adoption of herself. Their children, they had urged, were quite as near to Winifred as Gladys. They had regarded the poor girl as her cousins' despoker, and she had no desire for their company now.

"Oh, Hawkins!" she cried, bitterly, "I don't want to see them. Uncle Robert will preach me a sermon on the uncertainty of life, and Aunt Emily will declare it was a judgment for keeping a spirited horse. Oh, I shall feel angry; and yet they will hurt me cruelly! Why need the Keiths come?"

"Sir John Blake sent for them, Miss Gladys. You see, my dear young lady, they are my poor mistress's nearest kindred, and for them not to be asked here now would be a cruel slight; besides, Miss Gladys, you're too young to be left alone even till the funeral, and your uncle and aunt will look after you."

"I believe they hate me," cried the girl, ungraciously.

Hawkins shook her head.

"If I'm any judge, Miss Gladys, they'll be very fair spoken to you now. In the olden days they may have been jealous of Mrs. Tudor's love for you; but now, I beg your pardon, my dear, for saying it, they'll only remember that you are rich and they are poor, so they can't afford to offend you."

Gladys sighed.

She knew her relations deserved the criticism; but it hurt her keenly.

"Mr. Vesey is coming too," said Mrs. Hawkins. "You see, Miss Gladys, it's not like an ordinary death. There'll have to be an inquest and all that."

Was it possible only yesterday she had been thinking of Marmaduke Blake's proposal, and believing that to decide on her answer to it was her hardest care. Well, at any rate, the catastrophe, which had made her home desolate, left her free to please herself. She could marry Maurice now. She fancied he would wish it to be soon. Perhaps if they had a very quiet wedding they need not wait very long. Of course Maurice would give

up his profession. The master of Diamond End could not be at the call of any poor cottager who wanted medical aid.

She was roused from her reverie. The old butler stood before her with an unwilling face as he said, gravely,—

"Mr. Douglas is here, Miss Gladys, and asking to see you. I told him you could see no one until your uncle and aunt arrived; but he would make me bring his message."

"I will see Mr. Douglas, Hawkins. A doctor is not like an ordinary visitor."

Hawkins groaned inwardly.

"It's true, then," he muttered to himself; but he ventured on no remonstrance.

Another minute and Gladys was in her lover's arms.

There was no eagerness now about his wooing. No hesitation as to his avowal.

Gladys, dependent on her uncle's pleasure, might be a pauper; but Gladys, her uncle's sole heiress, must be a grand match for a struggling country surgeon.

"My darling," said Maurice Douglas, passionately, "how thankful I am you had promised me this little hand before your troubles came; I might have been afraid to propose to the owner of Diamond End, but you had given yourself to me before we knew your fortune was beyond Mr. Tudor's power to withhold."

Gladys did not like this speech quite; somehow it grated upon her, but meeting the glance of her lover's blue eyes her scruples faded; he loved her so, it was so sweet to think she had the power to give him wealth and fortune; meanwhile the doctor had something to say which he found it difficult to begin.

"Have you any idea whom the Squire has appointed as your guardian, dearest?" he asked at last.

"Not in the least; Aunt Winifred would certainly have been one but she is gone, and—" the tears interrupted Gladys.

"That meddling old idiot Sir John Blake was taking on himself to decide who should be sent

for yesterday," said Maurice. "I told him I thought it was my business to see to that, since I was your future husband, and if you'll believe it, Gladys, he positively insulted me."

"He is a hot-tempered man," confessed Gladys, "but true as steel. I am sorry you don't like him, Maurice; he is one of my oldest friends," abstaining with rare delicacy from mentioning Sir John's son had wished to be something nearer than a friend.

"Oh, I know all about that," said Maurice with a sneer; "he wanted your fortune for that lot of a son of his. Marmaduke Blake is a poor man despite his pride; it would have been a very nice arrangement for him to marry you."

"Don't, Maurice," pleaded the girl. "I feel so miserable already, don't try and make me doubt my friends. I don't think that any poor girl in the world can be so lonely as I am. Actually I have no relatives except an uncle and aunt who dislike me."

"You have me, Gladys! that is why I wanted to see you before these people come. I expect they are as purse-proud and suspicious as Sir John; you must take a high hand with them dear; just say you are going to marry me, and you won't be dictated to by anyone."

"I will not give you up for anyone," she answered faintly, "but indeed, Maurice, I don't think they would try to interfere. I have seen very little of them; Uncle Robert and his wife were very angry at my being adopted by the Tudors, they are far more likely to wash their hands of me."

"People are not so ready to quarrel with the heiress of ten thousand a year," said Maurice Douglas, sagely; "what time do you expect them?"

"I have no idea; Mr. Vesey will not be here till the afternoon, between three and four, he said."

"Ah, well, I shall look in again about five and give the Keiths and the lawyer clearly to understand you are my promised wife; there's no reason for them to know the Squire had not been asked for his consent."

Again a strange sense of disappointment stole over Gladys, but she only said gravely,

"I think they would be sure to hear that from others; I mean Uncle Dick had different views for me and I know he spoke of his wishes."

"Meaning Marmaduke Blake," said the doctor, slightly. "Well, Gladys, I must be off; keep up your spirits, darling, I shall be here again by five o'clock, and ready to fight your battles with all the world."

He was gone. Gladys sat on lost in a reverie, she was very much in love, but it did strike her that something in Maurice's manner had jarred on her tenderest feelings; still, woman-like, she only made allowances for him; he had known her uncle and aunt barely a year, and it was not to be expected he could feel their loss as she did.

Mr. and Mrs. Keith arrived in time for lunch, and Gladys found the old housekeeper's verdict on them quite correct; their manner to their orphan niece was indeed almost gushing. The clergyman promised "to be a father to her," and his wife assured her they would not leave her alone till after the funeral, when, if her guardians consented, they hoped to take her home with them on a long visit until some permanent arrangement could be made for the future.

"For you know, my dear, you can't possibly live here alone," said aunt Emily, decidedly. "You're far too young and pretty; of course your guardians might engage a chaperone for you, but I think you would be far better off with your own relations."

"I am engaged to be married," said Gladys, a deep, crimson blush dying her cheeks. "I should not like to leave Northshire, because of—"

Mrs. Keith interrupted her.

"I wonder my sister never told us the news, who is the happy man, my dear."

"Mr. Douglas."

"What, the village doctor! You are talking nonsense, Gladys. Dick Tudor was the proudest man I ever met. I don't believe he would ever have consented to such a thing."

The clergyman interposed.

"The lawyer will be here this afternoon, my dear, and, of course, he will know the Squire's wishes. I must confess it seems incredible that he should have allowed his heiress to accept a nobody, but he was a most eccentric man."

"And pride must have a fall," agreed his wife, piously. "After all the fuss that has been made over this girl, the idea of her marrying a village surgeon is absurd; but her guardians will have something to say to that. At any rate, until she is of age, they will protect her from fortune-hunters."

Gladys rushed out of the room. It was not very polite to her relations, but their remarks were well nigh torture to her. Safe in the privacy of her own bedroom she threw herself on her knees and sobbed as though her very heart was breaking. Why should people speak so harshly of Maurice Douglas?

A gentle tapping at the door and Mrs. Hawkins' voice was heard saying,—

"Lunch is ready, Miss Gladys."

"I am not coming down."

In her excitement she had forgotten to fasten the door, and the housekeeper gently turned the handle and entered.

"You'll be quite ill my dear young lady if you don't eat something, and it seems unkind to your uncle and aunt to leave them alone."

"I can't help it, Hawkins," cried the girl, hotly. "They shouldn't say such horrid things. I feel as if I hated them."

Good Mrs. Hawkins sat down by her young lady's side and pushed back the hair from her feverish brow with no untender touch.

"Your uncle Robert was my mistress's own brother, Miss Gladys. She always made him welcome."

"Perhaps he didn't hurt her," said Gladys. "He seemed to think of the cruellest things he could find to say to me. He actually told me my guardians would protect me from fortune hunters!"

Hawkins sighed.

"You've a lovely face, Miss Gladys, and there will be many to love you for yourself; but all the same, my dear, there'll be some tempted by the thought you are an heiress, and it'll be your guardians' duty to protect you from them. I doubt Mr. Keith meant kindly though he may have bungled over the saying it."

"You don't understand," irritably.

"I was Mrs. Tudor's maid, Miss Gladys, when she came home a bride. I was with her when her children died, and I never thought to outlive her. I was only a servant but she trusted me, and I'd have gone through fire and water for her. I know there wasn't much real sympathy between her and Mr. Keith. She used to say small means and a large family had made him hard and narrow, but for all that, Miss Gladys, he's a just man."

"He isn't," cried Gladys. "I told him I was engaged to Mr. Douglas, and he called him a fortune hunter."

A dead silence. Gladys, who had expected a burst of sympathy, was bewildered. She knew the old housekeeper was as romantic as a girl. She loved to hear of a courtship, a wedding was a joyous event for her, but now she offered no congratulations, and received the wonderful news without a word.

"Mr. Douglas is not rich," went on Gladys, much aggrieved at her old friend's silence, "but he is a gentleman, and my uncle trusted him. What is the use of my being an heiress if I can't marry whom I please?"

Then Mrs. Hawkins found her voice.

"Did the master know, Miss Gladys?"

"No; it only happened yesterday. We meant to tell him, but you know how he was brought home. Mrs. Hawkins won't you congratulate me!"

"I hope you'll be happy, Miss Gladys," the tone was cold and formal; the expression on the good woman's face would have befitted a funeral.

"You are as bad as Mr. Keith," cried Gladys, angrily; "you have no sympathy in you."

"I'm afraid, Miss Gladys I've got too much," said the housekeeper. "I'm sure the Squire

would never have consented to such a thing, and his mistress would have been against it."

"They always seemed to like Mr. Douglas."

"They were very hospitable," conceded Hawkins, "and when they asked him here, but as to treating him as an equal, Miss Gladys, they never did; and if they'd dreamed of this, they'd have forbidden him the house. You don't hear the gossip, Missie, but it's common talk in Chilton that Mr. Douglas hasn't a relation belonging to him no more than if he'd been a foundling. He borrowed the money to buy old Mr. Gibson's practice, and he's paying it off by instalments. He's never even mentioned one of his friends, or where he came from. That's not the sort of husband for the heiress of the Tudors."

Gladys left her tamper. Remember all she had gone through in the last twenty-four hours! Perhaps the strange feeling of disappointment her lover's conduct had given her only that morning made her all the more urgent in his defence, for she said, passionately,—

"As Mr. Douglas will shortly be the owner of Diamond End, I will thank you to speak of your future master with more respect."

The old servant looked at her sorrowfully.

"He may be the owner of Diamond End, Miss Gladys, but he'll not be my master. Hawkins and I have served the Tudors faithfully for many years, we'd both thought to end our days here, but if it comes to calling that man master, why we'd rather take a cottage in the village and try and live on the bit of money we've saved. We know what gentry are, Miss Gladys, and we'd not demean ourselves by serving anyone else."

She turned to go. Gladys bolted the door on the faithful old servant and began to cry afresh, not with passionate anger now but out of utter misery.

She did not doubt Maurice even yet, she was confident of her love for him, but she was intensely proud, and Mrs. Hawkins had wounded her to the quick.

Mr. and Mrs. Keith lunched alone and then went back to the library to discuss the situation. Poor things! they had some excuse for jealousy, for their own means were scanty.

Mrs. Tudor had been the eldest of three orphans, her beauty had won the Squire's heart. She came of gentle birth, and it mattered nothing to him that she was penniless. He never had any sympathy for her brothers; one of them, by dint of hard-won scholarships, got to Oxford, and, in due course, took orders; the other obtained a post in the Indian Civil Service, married on the voyage out, and dying young left his widow and only child utterly unprovided for.

Young Mrs. Keith never got over her husband's loss, and as it was some years since the death of Winifred Tudor's last baby, she and her husband, in despair of a child of their own, adopted the doubly-orphaned Gladys.

It was hard on Robert Keith. He had married in his first curacy and had a large family. His children were quite as near to the Tudors, yet they were never invited to Diamond End. The clergyman and his wife spent a fortnight there every summer, and at Christmas a goodly hamper found its way to the vicarage, that was all.

It was only human, then, that the pair should discuss things with anxious faces. Even such a small legacy would mean so very much to them, while the charge of Gladys, with a handsome allowance for her board, would make housekeeping a far easier problem.

"I don't believe the guardians will sanction her engagement," said the Vicar. "I've heard of this young Douglas; he's just a village surgeon with no private means. Why should he step into a place like this, and ten thousand a year?"

Enter the butler.

"Mr. Vesey is here, sir, and Sir John Blake. They would like a little conversation with you before seeing Miss Gladys."

Mrs. Keith had not the tact of Lady Blake, and at once signified her intention of making a fourth at the interview. Mr. Keith made no protest, he was used to feminine rule.

Sir John had met the couple before and cared very little about them. It struck him to-day they were distinctly objectionable. The Vicar's clothes were shabby and badly cut. Mrs. Keith's

black dress had too many bugles, they gave her a glittering blackness which was fatiguing to the eye.

"This is a sad business," said the lawyer.

"Terrible," agreed Mrs. Keith, "but I hope, gentlemen, you'll make that misguided girl hear reason. Gladys has actually engaged herself to Mr. Douglas, and means to marry him at once."

The Vicar looked at the two men anxiously.

"I am told the Squire left a will. I hope if a home is required for Gladys our claims will be considered. My wife would take good care of her, and the pious tone of our household might have a good influence over one who is I much fear spoilt by worldly indulgence, while we should find the remuneration very useful."

Sir John turned to the lawyer.

"Will you tell them or shall I?"

"I will. Mr. Keith I am afraid whoever provides a home for your niece, Gladys, must do so without remuneration; she is unhappily left utterly unprovided for," and then, in a few plain words he told the astonished pair how, Mrs. Tudor's dying before her husband rendered his will practically useless.

Husband and wife stared at each other.

"But who takes everything?"

"There are a few legacies which will be paid promptly, but the estate and its revenues will go to Mr. Tudor's next-of-kin, while his personal property will be equally divided among such relatives as can claim a right to share it."

"But my sister's things," Mrs. Keith grew plaintive, "her jewels and clothes, her pretty things, they would be a god-send to me, and my girls; surely we have a right to them!"

Mr. Vesey shook his head.

"Mrs. Tudor died intestate, and her husband would consequently take all she left. I have one piece of good news for you, Mr. Keith; the Squire has left a thousand pounds to your eldest son, either to pay for his education or start him in life."

The Vicar gave a sigh of relief. It was something for one of his tribe to have been remembered. Mrs. Keith would rather have had the handling of the money; safely invested it would have brought in thirty pounds a year!

"And Gladys," she asked anxiously.

Gladys can claim everything given specially to her or bought for her use—but of the Tudor property she cannot touch a shilling. It is just possible the heir-at-law when he hears how terribly fate has been against her, may offer some provision for her, but this would be a question for his own generosity—she can claim nothing."

"I'm very glad," cried a young voice, full of defiant misery, and Gladys herself stood before them.

She had entered in time to hear Mr. Vesey's explanation, but everyone had been too engrossed to hear her approach.

"I'm very glad I'm penniless, then people can't call my lover a fortune hunter. I am thankful I can prove to the whole world he chose me for myself alone. He will be here at five o'clock, and then you will be able to see for yourselves how cruel and unfounded was the charge my relations brought against him."

"It is five now," said Sir John very gently, "and I told Hawkins to show Mr. Douglas in here if he called. Gladys, my poor child, I hope and pray that your trust will be rewarded."

But it was not.

Maurice entered, beaming and triumphant; he took his place next Gladys. He challenged all present to divide him from her at their peril, and then . . . the blow fell, he listened to Mr. Vesey as one in a dream, defiant, incredulous.

"There must be some mistake," he cried hotly, "the whole world knows that Gladys was the Squire's adopted child."

"And there is no shadow of doubt had he lived long enough to realize that his wife's death had defeated the intentions of this will he would have made another, leaving Gladys his absolute heiress," said the lawyer, "but Mr. Douglas, he did not make another, and so we have to deal with things as they are."

"And no one will lift a finger to secure her rights," cried Douglas hotly.

"Softly. Miss Keith has no 'rights,' she has not one drop of the Tudor blood in her veins. Fortunately she is a young lady of simple tastes, and as your betrothed wife her future is secure."

Maurice Douglas looked round the room; the girl's hand rested even then on his arm, the three men watched him with expectant faces; he knew he should draw on himself their lasting contempt, but he never faltered, he could leave Chilton if needs were if he found himself too unpopular. Anything was better than encumbering himself with a penniless wife.

"I have far too much regard for Miss Keith to condemn her either to a long, weary engagement or a life of poverty," he said gravely. "All the world knows I have nothing but what I earn, and the practice of a village surgeon is scarcely enough to keep a bachelor. I love you too well, my Gladys, to drag you down to penury and want, and so I will release you from the promise given me yesterday, and leave you free."

He turned to leave the room, as the door closed on him with a dull, heavy sound, Gladys Keith fell unconscious to the ground, it was her first lesson in the world's falsehood, poor girl, and it was a bitter one.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMEWHERE in a very quiet old-fashioned town, about fifty miles away from London, was a flourishing ladies school.

Miss Primrose had opened her establishment for the movement for the higher education of women began; but she pluckily tried to keep pace with the times, and by dint of engaging very learned assistants, with certificates of every description, she managed to satisfy modern requirements, while the old lady herself, with her little white curls and pretty lace caps, seemed to impart an air of homeliness and motherly care to the establishment.

Miss Primrose was turned sixty. She had been at Cambrian House more than thirty years, and had made sufficient money to retire; but she had not a relation in the world, and she loved her work. She declared she should be lonely without young faces around her, and so it seemed likely she would long be the presiding power of Cambrian House.

All the girls loved her. The young accomplished certificated teachers found they could not rival Miss Primrose in the pupils' affection, and yet the old lady had a fault which has made many an instructress of youth desperately unpopular—she had a favourite. Everyone knew it, the teachers and the rest of the girls, even the servants and the visiting professors were aware that May Nairn was dearest of all her charges to Miss Primrose; but the oddest part of the business was everyone regarded this partiality as another mark of the old maid's virtues, for May Nairn was almost alone in the world. True, she had parents and brothers and sisters in Australia; but they never took the slightest notice of her. For thirteen years she had been at Cambrian House from the first of January to the thirty-first of December. A firm of London bankers sent a cheque each quarter, but that was the only communication Miss Primrose ever received concerning May; and if forty pounds a year was a fair provision for a child of five it was very little for a young lady of eighteen, who learned all the "extras," and was dressed prettily though simply. All the girls pitied May, not regarding the forty pounds, for the amount of the payments Miss Primrose kept quietly to herself; but because she was so terribly alone.

They all agreed with one voice she needed a little extra affection from their dear old governess as a kind of "make up," and one or two of the older and more thoughtful pupils wondered what would become of May when she was too old to stay at school any longer.

To tell the truth May often wondered it herself; and one night, when she was sitting alone with Miss Primrose talking of the new term, which began the next day, she suddenly inquired,—

"How much longer am I to stay here, Miss

Primrose? Don't you think I'm very nearly finished?"

"Do you want to leave me, May?" asked the schoolmistress, anxiously. "I have tried so hard to make you happy."

"And I have been happy," cried the girl, putting one arm round her old friend's neck gratefully. "If I were your niece, dear Miss Primrose, I should enjoy nothing more than staying here always, and beginning to help you in the school. If I were an orphan you had taken me in out of charity I shouldn't be ashamed of owing everything to you; but what I can't bear is to know I have a father and mother who never trouble their heads about me."

Miss Primrose stroked the girl's soft hair caressingly.

"Your mother loves you dearly, May. You make my word for that."

"But, I feel there is a mystery," said May, eagerly. "It can't be anything I've done, for I was only five years old when my mother gave me up, and I'm sure she loved me then. I've often thought Miss Primrose you knew something, and to-night I made up my mind I'd ask you."

Miss Primrose sat for a few minutes lost in thought. Then she said with an effort,—

"You shall know all, I can tell you, May; but it's little enough. You know I came here thirty years ago, and I had not been at Cambrian House very long when your mother came to me as a pupil. She was a pretty little girl of eight, and I thought it a great thing to have her for she was the grandchild of Sir Amyas Leigh, of Woodborough."

May flushed painfully, there was a Sir Amyas Leigh still at Woodborough, who assuredly must be of her mother's kindred, but who never troubled about her child.

"I loved your mother dearly," went on Miss Primrose, "though not as I have loved you. When she was sixteen they took her away from me, and sent her to a finishing school in Paris; her grandmother told me no one could learn French properly in England. Well, my dear, they taught pretty Mona Leigh something besides a foreign language at that French school. She was to be there two years, and before the second was half over the news came that she had eloped with the drawing master, who, I believe, was an Englishman. The Leighs were furious. Sir Amyas died not long after, and his son, who had spent a great many years abroad, took no interest in his niece's fate. I feel indignant even now when I think of how her family turned their backs on her, poor, pretty child that she was."

"And then?" asked May, pleadingly. "I am quite sure she came to you."

"Yes. One November evening, thirteen years ago, one of the servants came to tell me that a stranger, who would not give her name, was waiting to see me. It was seven years since I had parted from Mona, and she had changed from a pretty wilful child to a sorrow-stricken woman, but I knew her at once. She was in great trouble, I felt sure, but I did not ask her any questions. I put my arm round her and kissed her. I felt, poor dear, she would tell me her story best in her own way."

"My father?" breathed May.

"Your father had been dead two years. He seemed to have been devoted to his wife, but terribly unfortunate. He took her abroad shortly after the elopement. I think to one of the colonies, but I am not sure. Their life there was one continual struggle. Just as he was getting on he died. She came home with her little girl, hoping her own people or his would help her. The Leighs refused all her entreaties for a reconciliation. Her husband's relations did not answer her letters. At last, when she was almost starving, she went on the stage, not as an actress, but just to walk in processions."

"Then that is why when I think of my mother it is always of her bidding me, 'Good-night,' dressed in a hat and ulster," said May, "that is one of my recollections of her. Another is seeing her sit crying over a letter. I was only five you see, and backward for my age."

"Well, dear, I can't tell you much more. She hated the stage, and could hardly make enough

to keep herself and you. At last she met a gentleman she had known in your father's lifetime. He had inherited a fortune consisting chiefly of a sheep-farm in Australia. He had admired Mona always. Finding her a widow he proposed to her—but he was a jealous man, he would provide for her little girl in England but he would not allow her to share their home in Australia. He said his own children when they came must have no rival in their mother's heart."

"And she gave me up?"

"My dear, you must not judge her harshly; she was earning a pound a-week, with no chance of increase. Supposing she had been 'out' for a few weeks or ill what would have become of you both? Supposing she had stayed with you how could she have educated you? She told me, with the tears in her eyes, it almost broke her heart to leave you, and she would have refused Mr. Page if I had not promised to take you."

"Mr. Page! then even my mother's name is different now from mine?"

"I never meant you to hear it. Yes, my dear, she is Mrs. Page of Gimpey, a place in Queensland. Her husband is one of the richest men in the colony, and she has half-a-dozen children. I picked up this from a clergyman who had spent some months at Gimpey for his health, and been most hospitably entertained by Mrs. Page. He little guessed why I was so interested in all he could tell me of her."

"What did he say?"

"Just what I expected, that, though the richest woman for miles, Mrs. Page always seemed to be a sad one, that though her husband was devoted to her, and her children were a fine healthy brood, she seemed always fretting for something she had not. May, I know you blame your mother, but depend upon it she has suffered."

"If Mr. Page was really so fond of her he would give in to her I should think."

Miss Primrose shook her head.

"Mr. Thomson told me Mr. Page alluded to his wife's depression, and said speaking of England always made her sad, but for his part he never wanted to see his native land again. He seemed, Mr. Thomson said, a narrow-minded, obstinate man."

"Well," said May with a quiet bitterness in her voice which left no doubt of her earnestness, "I won't touch another penny of that man's money, and if I work my fingers to the bone I'll pay him back what he has spent on me."

"My dear, you would never earn so much, why, it would be over five hundred pounds, without counting interest."

May never faltered.

"If it were five thousand I would do it," she said passionately. "I don't blame my mother, if she was so weak and she feared poverty, I suppose she was right to sell her child for food and shelter but I will never forgive her husband, never while I live."

Miss Primrose felt almost frightened at the girl's vehemence.

"My dear," she said mildly, "that is a terrible resolution. I hope you don't mean it."

"I do—every word of it. I shall never forgive Mr. Page as long as I live, unless—"

"Unless he sends for you to join them in Australia?" suggested Miss Primrose.

May smiled a little mounfully.

"I was going to say something even more impossible. If I were richer than Mr. Page, and so grand that he felt it an honour to be connected with me, why then—I really think I could forgive him."

Miss Primrose felt puzzled; she realised dimly how little she understood the girl she had brought up.

"My dear," said the old maid gently, "won't you take my advice and give up this scheme of paying back Mr. Page. You can write to him if you like next mail, and say you have only just discovered your own history, and you would rather not be indebted to him in future. Then dear, you know I have saved money, and have plenty for us both, so there need be no thought of your leaving me."

"You are the dearest, kindest creature in the

world, Miss Primrose, but I couldn't do it. Now I know the truth I couldn't go on being just a school girl. I don't believe I shall ever settle down contentedly until I have paid Mr. Page."

Miss Primrose hesitated.

"May, I have saved money, and I always meant to leave you some; will you let me repay Mr. Page?"

"No, dear, I must do it myself. I'm longing to begin. Do you know for years I've hoped and hoped mother would send for me. I've thought of lots of things she could say to explain her strange silence, until to-night I never believed quite she had deserted me."

It was a harsh term, but Miss Primrose felt that Mona Page deserved it.

"She did it for love of you, dear."

"For love of ease and comfort," corrected May. "There, I'll not blame her, perhaps she was weak and could not help it. Now, Miss Primrose, you must advise me. You know the world, how am I to set to work to earn money quickly?" I don't mind what I do or how hard I work, if only I can pay Mr. Page, and write and tell him what I think of him."

Miss Primrose kept silent; she was thinking that with May's beauty, she ought to marry young, and that love would drive out of her head this strange new fancy.

The girl must have read her thoughts.

"I shall never marry," she answered gravely, "if men can drive such bargains as my step-father's they are cruel and bad, besides, I have made up my mind, Miss Primrose, I must earn that money. I shall never have any peace, I shall never be able to hold up my head again until I can throw Mr. Page back his hated charity."

(To be continued.)

A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

—:—

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THOROLD MUSGROVE prolonged his ride much further than he had originally intended on purpose to give himself time to view his position calmly, and to make some good plan for immediate action.

He took tender care of Babs, and after they had had a delightful little luncheon at a country roadside inn, he determined to take the girl back by easy degrees, for he feared to tire her.

Babs was so full of chatter and enjoyment of her ride that Thorold's grave manner escaped her sharp eyes.

She did not wait for him to answer her, she was quite content to chatter on and ride secure in the knowledge of his safe protection.

The young man did his best to throw away care and troubled thought, but the task was not easy.

He had a sensation of discomfort upon him too strong to be measured in torment—Miriam's confession not only troubled him, but it gave him a distinct sensation of personal hurt.

He felt as though he had done some wrong thing to Settefeld even merely in having been the recipient of such a confession, notwithstanding that it was an event that had been absolutely unsuspected and assuredly most undesired.

The contempt that mingled in his feelings for Miriam at this juncture seemed to light a little upon himself; he was harsh with himself and blamed himself that he should have been associated in a moment so pregnant with everything that was contrary to his life's code of honour.

He blamed himself for having accepted Miriam's invitation.

He told himself he should have guessed that the coquetry she had shown him so plainly in the beginning, would in all probability desire to find a vent even after everything that had occurred.

For he was more and more assured as the moments went by that Miriam's foolish and most reprehensible conduct of the morning had no other ground or reason, save feeble vanity, and

that same poor spirit which had carried so much havoc to him only a few short months ago.

Now that the first sensation of surprised uneasiness and a vague pity (the sort of pity he would have given to any woman's distress) had worn away, Thorold was fiercely angry with Miriam for trying to cast blame, or to hint indefinite harm against the man she called her husband, and who loved her so adoringly.

It was simply impossible for Thorold to find a single trait in Settefeld's character on which to build up the smallest belief in wrong-doing. Miriam had said nothing, but her manner, her words, her agitation had inferred more than any words could have done.

Thorold could not shut his eyes to this fact, and to the fact that she had intended him to understand that her marriage had not been a free and voluntary act on her part, but that she had been coerced into it by some potent yet vague power; that Settefeld had taken undue advantage of some influence he possessed to make her false to him (Thorold), and false to herself.

That in short the proud position she occupied was one she had never coveted, but that it had been thrust upon her by a man whom she feared and hated.

Seen out in the clear, cold light of day, far away from the fascination of Miriam's wonderful loveliness, it seemed to Thorold as if he must appear to Miriam a really remarkable fool.

The whole idea was so preposterous!

He laughed bitterly and cynically to himself at his momentary weakness in believing her words and in pitying her distress.

"To have been bitten once as I was, and not to be well armed for all future attacks of this kind is only to prove conclusively that I am a much bigger idiot even than I had imagined!—Lady Settefeld, I congratulate you. You set yourself the task of playing a little comedy with me and you have succeeded, and if your desire was to bring shame and sorrow into my heart in this, your last attack, you may be said to have won a triumph, for I have a mortification and a sense of dishonour upon me at this moment such as I have never felt before in all my life!"

"Thorold, you have got into such a bad habit of frowning!" Babs cried, as his thoughts arrived at this point. "What is the matter, have you got a headache, are you tired?"

Thorold laughed at this.

It was amusing to imagine that a ride of a few miles could fatigue his stalwart frame. He gave a sigh as he laughed.

The young girl's breezy fresh companionship was very pleasant to him, it acted like a wave of clear, pure air, over the troubled, almost fevered drift of his thoughts.

"I want you to wake up," Babs declared. "You have to do lots of things for me. You have to draw me plans and things like Lady Patricia tells me you drew for her poor, sick cousin. Lady Patricia said you were wonderful in the way you explained everything. You must explain everything to me too, please."

Thorold's colour deepened, and his heart leaped as she spoke Patricia's name.

"I will do all this for you the next time I go to Crowhurst, Babs," he answered, hurriedly. "I shall not have any opportunity here, for I am—"

"Oh!" Babs drew her rein and stopped her cob in her excitement and disappointment. "Oh! Thorold, don't say you are going away from here. You said last night you thought you could stay another week!"

"Ah! but last night and to-day are two different things, little Barbara!"

But Babs only looked at him disconsolately.

"You must go, honour bright, Thorold! Oh! I am disappointed. I was awfully cut up when Mr. Blanqueville went away so suddenly, but though he was very nice, he was not you. Oh! dear, this is a blow!"

Thorold laughed, and bending forward he pinched her glowing cheek tenderly. The thought passed bitterly through his mind—

What a pity to let so fair and fresh and innocent

cent a creature blossom into a woman like Miriam!

The next instant the cynical thought had gone, driven from his mind by the swift pictures of sweet, good womanhood that rose before him.

His beloved mother—dear gracious Lady Stapleton, Dolly, and many others like her—and above and beyond all of these, that one noble, beautiful, young face and form which was to him now and henceforth the ideal of everything a woman should be.

Because one human being had failed so signally, because one lovely human body was the casket for so worthless a nature, must he judge and dismiss all as bad and black?

"We shall meet very soon, Babes dear," he said, as jovially as he could. "I promised your mother faithfully to go to Crowhurst at Easter."

"Ah! yes, that is all very well," cried Babes, "but how do you know I shall be there, I am going to stay here as long as ever I can; I do love Lady Patricia, and I want to be near her!"

"But what about the lessons, Babes?"

Babes noticed nothing new or strange in Thorold's voice, the little quiver that ran through it did not touch the child's comprehension.

"Oh! mother told me I need not study while I was here, but I do study, Thorold; I read Italian and French every day, with darling Lady Pat! she is so clever!" and Babes sighed, "and then Dolly gives me music lessons, so I am not idle. Perhaps we might persuade Lady Pat to come back with us when we go to Crowhurst. Oh! that would be just heavenly! I shall ask her directly we get in!"

"Then let us hurry, or we shall be late, and I don't want to keep you out too long."

The rest of the homeward way was achieved without much settled conversation, and when Babes was finally lifted from her saddle in the courtyard at Belton she absolutely had to confess she had had quite enough exercise for one day.

"But you are not too tired, little one," Thorold asked anxiously, for he had been so lost in his thoughts, it came upon him with a flash he might have overtaxed the child's strength.

He wanted to carry her upstairs, but Babes would not hear of this, and had danced out of sight even while he was proposing such a course of action.

With a smile Thorold turned away.

It was now growing towards late afternoon. If he intended to leave Belton that night, he ought to go in and make immediate preparation for his departure.

Yet he hesitated to enter the house.

He turned away and began walking through the grounds.

Go he certainly must and would, but he must act above all things with discretion.

Settefeld would not understand so hurried a departure, and Patricia—

Ah! there lay the keynote of his hesitation.

He could not go so suddenly—without a word exchanged with Patricia, perhaps even without seeing her.

His heart flamed over her now with a new and a greater longing of love and tender sadness.

Since Miriam had drawn aside the veil and revealed herself so utterly, Thorold had comprehended so much that before had been difficult.

He saw as clearly as though it were stretched before his eyes, the anguish that must have lived in Patricia's heart from the very first; what an unmistakable grief she had endured since the first days of her brother's betrothal and marriage, and how such suffering had undermined her health and her happiness.

Miriam must have been no secret to Patricia, and herein had lain the cause of the girl's wan, ill-look—the meaning of that sorrow which had lived so perpetually in the dark beauty of her eyes.

Loving her brother with such deep devotion, such heartfelt affection, Thorold could understand

what the knowledge of Miriam's unworthiness must have been to Patricia De Burgh.

He had a little pang at his heart as he remembered how he had taken Patricia into his confidence.

How he had dwelt upon his joy, his hopes, his coming happiness.

True he had never spoken Miriam's name in connection with these things, but he felt now that Patricia had known the identity of his love, and he seemed to read with ease the additional pain his confidences must have given her—not on his account only, but because at the very moment that he was living in his fool's paradise the woman he adored was promised as the wife to Patricia's brother.

Thorold's face flushed hotly as he let his imagination sketch the effect made upon Patricia could she be told the last and fullest evidence of Miriam's unworthiness.

Had he been tempted ever so little to give credence to the suspicious Miriam insinuated against her husband, the memory of what this man was to Patricia de Burgh would have settled the matter once and for all.

But Thorold had no need of Patricia's love to prove to him how infinitely greater and better was the husband's nature to the wife.

A pain, born of the true sympathy lodged at his heart as he conjured up what torture so proud, so honourable, so good a man must suffer if the truth of his wife's disloyal and vain character were ever to be revealed to him.

He remembered that Settefeld now occupied the place that once had seemed to him the ideal of heaven on earth.

He was Miriam's husband!

How little could Thorold Musgrave have ever imagined in those early days of his infatuation, that an hour would come when he would give out pity, deep and unlimited, for the future of the man who called Miriam his wife!

"With me the blow fell heavily and sharply, for after all, much of what happened was my own fault, my own blind, ignorant folly—but with him!" Thorold's very thoughts seemed to stop short, aghast at the possibility of the tragedy that must be worked in Lord Settefeld's whole life, if circumstances should ever arise to upset his dream of love and trust!

"Pray Heaven, it may never come," Thorold said, earnestly to himself, as he walked on and on into the heart of the grounds. "Pray Heaven he may never—never know—but I fear—I fear—if she could begin so easily—if she could forget her honour, her duty, her dignity, at this, the very beginning of her life, when love is poured on and about her like a flood of perpetual sunshine, what is to prevent her in the future! She would have me believe that it is for my sake she has debased her woman's modesty; but I know better, and when I try to look into the future my heart is cold with doubt and fear."

He thrust his hands into the pockets of his rough tweed coat as he strode on.

"It is not of him alone that I think, I fear," he said sadly; "there is her mother, as well as the one to whom death itself would be sweeter than the faintest shade of suspicion, of dishonour, of disappointment to her brother. Ah! poor child, my heart grieves for your grief, that is to come so surely, just as my heart yearns to share this grief with you, to give you comfort and help when it does come."

Thorold found himself a long way from the house as he arrived at this point in his thoughts.

He had walked very swiftly and he had covered a great distance.

He came to a thick clump of trees that had been felled, and he seated himself on one of the rough trunks and his thoughts took another turn.

He had confessed to himself that it was Patricia who held him from going immediately from Belton.

For the chance of seeing her once again, of speaking to her, of drawing fresh life as it were from the sweetness of her presence, he was ready even to come in contact again with Miriam and to rest a guest beneath her roof.

He put things before himself plainly at this moment.

"I am wrong, doubly wrong—I must not stay—I must go and at once," he said to himself, doggedly; "to remain is an insult to the man, a tribute to Miriam's unworthy vanity, and an additional sorrow for myself in the future, for each time I give myself these pleasures my hope grows and grows, and my hope must never be allowed to grow. Patricia is my sun, my very life, but she is as far away from me as the real sun, and there can never be any thought of drawing her nearer. Yes, I must go. In my work I shall perhaps find once again the medicine needed to cure my heart's pain, though this time the pain will be different. There will be no bitterness, no sense of wrong, no reproach, it will be the pain of a hope that must perish, of a love that must never be spoken, never made known!"

He sat in the same attitude for a long time, his thoughts grew very sad, for despite his own courage and his wisdom he was young, and his love, this second and stronger and nobler love, was so keen, so young, so precious to him.

He would not swerve from his duty, on that score he had no fear for himself, yet, though he might live for centuries he would never be able to conquer this love, never be able to root it up and cast it out of his heart as he had now done with the madneat that Miriam's beauty had kindled so fiercely.

Patricia was more than his love. She was his friend—his comrade in sympathy.

Her hand had drawn him through the darkest hour of his life, and her influence it was that would lead him on till the end of that life was reached.

The sound of a hasty and heavy footstep aroused him suddenly. He looked round and rose to his feet as Smithson came towards him.

The keeper looked anxious.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said, touching his cap respectfully. "But can you give me any idea where I can find his lordship. I am anxious to see him. Lady Patricia—"

"She is ill!" Thorold said hurriedly and in great fear.

The keeper nodded his head.

"I'm dreadfully upset about her ladyship. She've been at our cottage all the day. Unfortunately the man Butler died in her presence, when she was alone, too, and its been an awful shock I fear. Anyhow, she were just going back to the house, about three-quarters of a hour ago sir, when she were seized with a heavy fainting fit, and there she lies, and my wife and Mrs. Maxton, her ladyship's maid, sir, are in a fine way; and Mrs. Maxton, she sent me off to find the Earl and take him to Lady Patricia. She seemed to want him." Smithson added, his eyes going round him as he spoke, "for she murmured something about him just as she were fainting off. I've been up to the house, but they tell me his lordship ain't been in to luncheon, and they thought he were with you. I'm afraid his lordship will be very angry when he knows as Lady Patricia is so ill. He come to my cottage this morning to speak about the pigeon shooting, as I were arranging down in the lower grounds, and he did not seem too pleased then."

Smithson had a real troubled air about him.

"I have not seen the Earl," Thorold answered, hurriedly; and he wondered why it was that his heart should begin to beat so violently.

It was the connection of ideas between Settefeld and Miriam's disloyalty that really caused him this agitation.

"Have you been to the shooting-ground?" he asked.

Smithson said "No," adding confidently,—

"But his lordship is not likely to be there now, sir. I expect he've rode over to see Mr. Congreve, his agent; he said something about going yesterday. I want to find him if I can, for Mrs. Maxton seemed to think her ladyship would not be better till his lordship came. They've always been so attached, sir, as, perhaps, you know; and our dear young lady she never seemed to be able to get on at all without her brother. Are you coming with me, sir?" Smithson asked, as Thorold turned beside him.

The young man answered "Yes," very quietly.

His heart was stirred to its uttermost depth by the news of Patricia's illness.

Though Smithson had added no explanation he knew without words that her gentle charity had taken her to the keeper's cottage. He was grieved to think she should have been actually present at the time of Butler's death. He knew how sensitive she was, and he feared the impression might have a bad effect upon her.

Smithson's words about her love for her brother brought a mist of tears over Thorold's eyes.

There was nothing new to him in the recital of this fact, and yet, to-day, the words had a new and a deeper significance.

"Her love, how precious it is! Maybe it will be all he will have to call his very own later on!" Thorold thought to himself sadly. "If only it may be permitted to stand between him and sorrow, she will be well content I know!"

The two men pursued their way in silence.

Thorold had heard some conversation about this shooting ground.

Lord Settefeld was a crack shot and was devoted to all forms of sport.

After the end of the real shooting season he had hit upon the idea of having this plot of ground laid out where pigeons of clay were always ready for his friends and his own amusement.

"Not the real birds, Danvers," Patricia had urged with eagerness when she heard of the idea, and he, smiling, had reassured her.

"No cruelty to animals at Belton," he had said, and in truth the shooting at Belton was not in the least the fashionable form of slaughter to be undertaken, as Smithson contemptuously observed, by "arm-chair" sportsmen.

"I feel we're going in the wrong direction, sir," Smithson broke the silence by saying, after a long pause. "Oh! no, I don't mean as we're on the wrong track; this is the right path, but I mean I'm sure we shan't find his lordship there, and yet I don't like to go back without seeing for certain, for I feel my lady wants him very badly."

"There can be no harm in looking," Thorold said.

He spoke mechanically and he moved along in the same mechanical fashion as he spoke.

The thought of Patricia lying ill at that moment hurt him so keenly that nearly every other emotion was pushed on one side.

Her delicate health had been something more than a regret when she had been nothing to him or his wife but now!

Smithson made an occasional remark as he went along, but it was very evident that his simple mind was exceedingly troubled.

He spoke of this to Thorold.

"You see, sir, the poor chap was so set on seeing her ladyship, and when a man's at death's door it seems hard not to do what he wants, more particular like when one knows that her ladyship would have been real hurt if she had found out afterwards as he'd asked for her. All the same I'd have give a good deal if all this hadn't happened—it weighs on my mind, sir—I've known his lordship and Lady Patricia all their lives, sir, and you see they're very dear to me."

"I am sure of it, Smithson, just as they are dear to all who know them."

Thorold spoke with such warmth that Smithson looked at him with pleasure in his rugged face.

"There ain't no two people better and more straight than the Earl and her ladyship, sir; I wish as I could see our dear young lady getting stronger, it frets me truly."

They had reached the end of the wood by this time.

"Yon's the ground, sir," Smithson said, "it's well placed I think."

Thorold acquiesced as he glanced at the enclosure surrounded by a high wooden wall.

His mind, however, was far away from entering into the merits or demerits of the shooting-ground.

"There is no sound," he said, as they approached the entrance, "and it is getting

dark now, I think we shall have to look elsewhere, Smithson, his lordship is evidently not here."

The keeper pushed open the gate or wooden door.

"We'll just glance round and then—"

Standing still Smithson shaded his eyes with his big roughened hand.

It was an old habit and he always did it when he wanted to see very clearly.

He paused for a moment; Thorold had followed him through the entrance.

The young man gave a start as the keeper suddenly took him by the arm.

"What's you?" the question came sharply yet fearfully. "Sir, you're yes are better than mine is—"

Then breaking off with a sort of inarticulate exclamation Smithson released Thorold's arm and ran like a madman across the open space towards a dark mass that lay upon the ground, still—silent.

Thorold ran too.

He was cold and faint and sick.

The anguish of that moment never wholly passed from his memory.

He had no need to run—no need for Smithson's wailing cry as the keeper dropped all at once on his knees by the body that lay so still on the ground.

The worst was told to Thorold in the first instant. The man whom Smithson picked up in his strong arms and held pressed against his shoulder while words of incoherent grief and despair fell from his lips, would never move or speak again.

He was shot through the heart; blood was thick upon the ground; it had broken from the ashén lips, it had saturated the clothes.

He must have been dead for hours.

The hands were stiff. The fatal stumble that had caused the accident had closed the right-hand fingers in a grip of iron round the gun. He had fallen on his face. His body was distorted as with a swift and awful agony, and the expression in the ghastly face, with its big staring unseeing eyes, was terrible to look upon.

Smithson realising at last that no mortal aid could bring back the spirit of the man he had served and loved so well, laid the head reverently on the ground, and drew the rough tweed cap lying close at hand over the fixed face of the dead.

Then his courage and his strength went, he broke into a passion of tears and rocked himself to and fro in the uncontrollable anguish of his grief.

Thorold stood by gaping down on the living and the dead.

His own eyes were dry; he envied Smithson the power of tears.

His whole thought was for Patricia, the twin soul of the creature cut down so suddenly, so awfully in the midst of his good, his honourable life.

How would it be with her when the blow fell upon her? Would she be able to bear it, or would she, too, pass away from earth at the time when life should have been offering its fairest flowers to her?

The subject was too terrible, too fraught with sorrow and despair, he dared not let it dwell in his thoughts.

He roused himself suddenly.

Stooping he touched Smithson on the shoulder. "Go and bring help—he—he must be carried away from here. I will remain till you return."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

How long he remained alone with the dead Thorold could not have told.

The afternoon died into dusk. It was growing late. The spot was desolate beyond description. The empty branches of the trees waved and swayed in the cold wind.

Thorold paced slowly up and down—up and down.

After the keeper had staggered away, walking like a man who was drunk and could not hold his footing, Thorold had fallen on his knees beside that still cold form.

He had drawn the cap from off the face and with tender trembling fingers he had shut down the heavy fringed eyelids over the big dark eyes that were to him so pitifully, so horribly like Patricia's eyes. Then taking a handkerchief from his pocket he had spread it over the dead face, and then he knelt a little longer. He tried to say a prayer, but though prayer was natural to him, his senses seemed frozen by the horror of the moment.

The only thing that was keen, that lived within him, was the thought of Patricia, the fear of what would befall her after this was brought to her knowledge.

Miriam was pushed out of remembrance altogether, at least where grief was concerned.

If she came into his thoughts at all, it was to provoke a shiver as he gazed on the form of the man she had tried to malign, only that of whose love she was assuredly not worthy.

Had that scene of a few hours ago not passed between them, Thorold must have felt a wave of deep pity for the young wife so suddenly bereft of her husband and her love.

But now, remembering all she had said, realising in this grim moment the fulness of her contemptible vanity and disloyalty, to j in her in the same thoughts as clustered about the sister's grief was almost a sacrifice.

Slowly he paced to and fro.

Hemméd in by the wooden walls, Thorold seemed as if he were in a new and a desolate land.

He did not realise everything very clearly. His mind had not yet begun to conjecture as to the cause of this most awful tragedy.

How a man like Settefeld, to whom a gun was as ordinary and customary a thing as a pen, could have stumbled and met his death in so curiously simple a manner.

That there was any suspicion of foul play Thorold could not (even if his mind had been tuned to question and conjecture) possibly believe.

What man living had a grudge against Settefeld? moreover, if proof were needed conclusive and terrible that the death had been the cause of a self-inflicted accident, one glance at the rigid hand that gripped the gun would be sufficient.

None of these questions or theories or speculations arose as yet to harass Thorold's mind.

He had but one thought, one living, burning thought of agony. The thought of Patricia, of how her face would look when she was told, of how the effects would be when her brain received the appalling truth!

No thought would come but this, and a dark, dreary, hopeless misery settled on the man's heart.

He moved to and fro mechanically, keeping his tender watch over Patricia's beloved dead.

It must be long, he knew, before Smithson could return with help to carry the silent master to his home again.

The dusk stole over the sky, things were becoming indistinct, comingled, round and about the white handkerchief, on the face of the dead gleamed a patch of light, where all was growing dark.

A distant clock chimed some hour.

Thorold heard it but it conveyed nothing to him; time, place, life itself seemed to have gone from him since the moment he had stood and looked upon the tragedy of Patricia's heart.

His mind was so full of her, that he was not even surprised, he did not start or utter a word as a tall, slender figure came hurrying through the mist of evening towards him. He knew it was she.

He guessed the rest. She had seen Smithson, she had insisted on the truth; she had come hither, despite her weakness, despite everything.

She did not look at him, nor speak to him, she went past him, and crouching on the ground beside the dead, she drew the handkerchief away and wrapping her arms about the body she drew the head up, till it rested on her heart.

She did not cry, she did not speak. She was perfectly calm, ~~calm as a picture on level~~.

The dusk hid her face, but Thorold could imagine it, ~~as pale as a picture on level~~. It was he knew, as white, as fixed, as lifeless

as the face of him who was pillow'd on her breast.

The tension on his nerves was horrible.

He bore it for a few moments. Then he had to speak.

He came up to her quite close.

"Lady Patricia," he said, and his voice sounded strange and harsh to his own ears.

She looked up at him.

"Will you leave me please?" she said in her quiet, low, clear voice. "You have been very good. I thank you for your thought in staying with him, but now—" she broke off. "Leave me with him alone," she said, hoarsely. "They will come directly. . . . This . . . this moment must be mine!"

He turned and went away immediately.

He went through the wooden doorway and closed the door after him, standing there like a sentinel.

Tears that had been denied him just now were falling fast and thick, blinding his eyes and drawing the blood from his heart.

It was not long, as she had said, before they came.

Maxton was the first.

She was like a creature demented.

"Let me through—let me pass, sir!" she said fiercely. "I must be with her. She'll stand me. She's my child, my lamb, my treasure! Must there be two taken in one day? Oh, Heaven, spare her—spare her! Soften the blow to her, oh, merciful Heaven!"

The sight of the woman's weakness brought back Thorold's strength.

He tried to comfort her while the men, under Smithson's direction, were making a sort of ambulance in which to carry the dead man up to the house, and he spoke so gently that the frenzy of Maxton's grief was softened.

"You'll forgive me, sir, I know," she said to him, brokenly. "But, oh! this is so awful—so awful! His poor lordship! so good, so dear to her; and she, my lamb, my dear! Oh, sir, you'll forgive me, but I'm most out of my mind!"

And the poor woman rocked herself to and fro in her grief.

When the men were ready, Thorold went in through the doorway again.

"Let me go alone," he whispered, and they stood outside and waited.

She was sitting just the same—the head resting on her heart.

She looked round at his footstep.

"Are they ready?" she asked, and, as he answered "Yes," she bowed her head.

He saw her lay the handkerchief once more over the face, and then she staggered to her feet.

As his hands went out to her involuntarily, she drew back.

"I am quite strong—I can stand alone," she said in that dull, hushed voice.

He left her standing there, but as the men came solemnly towards her bearing a litter and bringing a light to help them in their sorrowful task, Thorold glanced at the woman he loved.

She stood there, proudly beautiful—most beautiful—in the silent majesty of her grief.

There were no tears in her eyes, no movement of the set lips; but, as the lantern flashed an instant across her, he saw with a start that her hair seemed to have grown snowy white, and he knew in that sign that, with her brother's death, had died also the youth, the first freshness of her life.

(To be continued.)

ALTHOUGH one does not often see cottages made by turning a large boat bottom upwards near frequented watering-places, there are still thousands of them dotted here and there up and down our coasts. In the north of England and in Scotland there are sometimes small streets of them well above high-water mark, and they are often most comfortable dwellings. Some of their inmates are fairly prosperous people and, despite their eccentric places of habitation, pay rates and taxes in respect of the latter, just as the occupier of a villa does.

THE SQUIRE'S SON.

—:—

CHAPTER XLIII.—(continued.)

"You will not say no," he murmured. "If you knew, Lucille, how I love you, if you knew too how eager I am to commence the pursuit you would not say no when I ask you to be mine at once."

"At once!" she breathed.

"At once," he repeated softly. "Within the week."

"Within the week!" she echoed, brokenly, "why, why so soon?"

He looked troubled, half spoke, then hesitated, then slowly, and as if reluctantly, said,—

"Lucille, I can have no secrets from you, my heart will speak out. You ask me why so soon. I will tell you. But first I must ask you to keep inviolate what I now tell you. I dare not give you my reason unless you do. Come, Lucille, your promise."

"I promise," she said, yielding more to his soft, seductive voice than to his words.

"Last night then, my darling, I heard, I dare not say from what lips, that the Count would return to Rome before a few days had passed."

"Return to Rome!" she echoed, transfixed with astonishment.

"Hush!" he breathed, warningly, with a flush of delight at the success of this commencement of his plot. "Hush, it is a secret; these walls must not hear it, for fear they should whisper it to their master."

"But, but," she mused, regaining her passionless calmness in a moment—"you must be wrong."

"No, that is impossible," he said. "Believe me, Lucille, I heard it from undoubted lips. The Count returns to Rome within a few days. And now prepare, my own Lucille, for still further suspense, surprise—nay, indignation."

"Speak on," she said, hurriedly.

"Can you guess why he returns so hastily to the city against which he has rebelled?"

She shook her head thoughtfully.

"It is—oh, I shame to utter the words, true as they are—to purchase safety and favour of the Count."

She turned pale but did not speak.

"Be calm," murmured Reginald Dartmouth. "More, Lucille, remains to be told. He goes to regain his old position, to give his allegiance to his old enemies, and to heal the long-opened breach by—wedding his niece, Lucille, Countess Vitzarelli, to the young Count of Naples!"

At this climax she started to her feet, her face dyed crimson, her eyes flashing with fire.

"Hush," he cried, catching her arm. "For Heaven's sake do not utter a word or all is lost! Lucille, be calm, be seated, I beg, I implore you!"

And he drew her to the couch, she submitting with the air of a person lost in a dream or trance.

A few minutes passed in death-like silence, the Countess still cold and marble-like, the plotter chuckling in the innermost recesses of his heart at the success of his scheme.

Then he said,—

"Lucille, you are calm enough now for me to show you the proofs—not that I would think you need them—but, well, see here."

And he held out a despatch which had cost him three sleepless hours to forge.

She took it, but her eyes refused to follow the closely written lines.

With a gesture of impatience she pressed it back on him.

"I—I cannot read it—tell me."

"It is a despatch from my secret agent who keeps me informed of the slightest event; his despatches are forwarded by special messengers. This reached me last night; it contains but a few paragraphs, concise and formal, but proven to the uttermost. Listen: 'Count V. will start for Rome within a few days. A diplomatic arrangement has been entered into. The alliance will be strengthened by the union of Count of N. with Lucille, Countess of V.' State papers have been

prepared which I have seen.' Thus far the statement. The proofs—see, Lucille, are here. Here in my hand I hold a copy of the draft my agent speaks of. See!"

She waved her hand.

"Enough," she exclaimed, with tightly drawn lips. "I see it all—all. The abhorred villainy! Oh, Heaven, in whom can one trust? Santa Maria, Vitzarelli play traitor! Who, then, can be true?"

"I—I—Lucille," he breathed, drawing her cold stately form towards him. "I can—I am true; trust in me! I would give my life to save you from this dishonour, for dishonour it is, base and terrible. Trust in me, Lucille, and I will turn the tables upon them all."

"Listen," he continued. "Last night the despatch came upon me like a flash of Heaven's lightning. Lucille, it nearly drove me mad. But I crushed the storm within me and sat down to think a way out of the terrible danger. There was but one way, and that was our immediate and secret marriage. I said to myself—the Count will keep his intention even of the journey close until nearly the hour of his starting. He will then frame some plausible excuse to disarm Lucille's suspicions, will probably tell her that Rome has fallen into our hands, and that he is going into it victorious. He may not go for a fortnight—he cannot go for a week because there are matters connected with the society here in London which he cannot neglect without danger of awakening its suspicions. I said he has planned all—be certain of that, and it now remains to frustrate his plans by more astute ones. I set myself the task, Lucille, and I accomplished it. It needs only your consent to foil this treachery and circumvent it. I have arranged everything, have left nothing unthought of—no emergency unprepared for. Our marriage must be consummated secretly, and almost at a moment's notice. The Count must know—nay, suspect nothing."

"Once married—once you are mine in deed as well as in name—we can laugh him to scorn, and leave him to the punishment his treachery deserves. Then, Lucille, hand in hand, we will commence the search you are so eager for."

She remained silent, with her eyes fixed on the ground for a few moments.

Then she raised them, and very slowly, calmly said—

"So be it. I trust you!"

"Lucille," he breathed, with passionate rapture. "You consent to let me save you! My own, my queen, my noble Lucille!"

A shade as of impatience crossed her brow and she interrupted him, almost sternly,—

"Your plans?"

"Are these," he said, hastily resuming his old manner. "You must hold yourself in readiness to meet me at any moment I may appoint. A portmanteau must be kept packed and ready. Not by sign or word must you rouse the suspicions of the Count. Remember that he will be unusually watchful, and keep a guard on every look—every gesture. I will postpone the ceremony until the latest moment that it will be safe to do so, and in all things, Lucille, I shall not forget that necessity, necessity alone compels this course, and try to place my bliss in the background until your peril is passed. I shall keep a lookout, a keen watch upon the Count's movements, and immediately he announces his intention of starting for Rome will arrange for the marriage. You will hold yourself ready, Lucille!"

"I will," she said.

He rose, fearing to lose by staying, one tittle of the advantage he had gained.

"I must tear myself away, my own, for much remains to be done. Farewell for awhile."

She gave him her hand and allowed him to kiss her forehead with the same dreamlike look, then, as if with a start, stopped him by a gesture and said,—

"The locket! Has anything been done to recover it?"

"Yes," he murmured, his hand upon the door, for he heard the Count's voice in the hall, and wished to get away without meeting him. "Yes, I have offered a reward, dear Lucille, but it has not been found. I say not been found, for had it been found, the largeness of the reward would have

caused its restitution. Do not fear," he added in a whisper, "it will be restored," then, with another low-breathed farewell, he was gone.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CAPTAIN DARTMOUTH'S secretary was an observant young man, and happening to be in his room as his master passed through it after his return from Grosvenor Square, he saw with a sharp glance through the dark spectacles that the handsome daring face wore a slight smile of triumphant satisfaction and pleasure.

This set him wondering.

"Some fresh villainy," he thought, "or a step farther in the old. Hem! I must glean what I can."

Accordingly he rose and followed the captain a few steps, coughing behind his hand as a hint that he wished for his attention.

"Well, what is it, Stanfield?" asked Reginald Dartmouth, stopping short and facing him with the pleasant look upon his face still. "What is it? I wish to Heaven you would pluck up a little spirit and speak out instead of coughing like an asthmatical apple-woman. What is it?"

"I fear I disturb you, sir," said the secretary, apologetically. "But I wished to ask you what reply you would like sent to the steward at Dale; he writes requesting to know your intentions as to the house for the autumn months."

It was such a pertinent home thrust of a question that Reginald Dartmouth almost started, but a glance at the expressionless face before him reassured him, and he said,—

"Ah, I promised to tell him. Well, I don't know, Stanfield. Suppose you say that he had better prepare for a month hence—then it will be ready."

These last words were spoken musingly and with a peculiar intonation that sharpened the hidden eyes wondrously.

"Ready; for what?" he wondered. "Very good, sir. A month hence. One more question. There is an invite from the Duchess for this day fortnight!"

"Refuse," said Reginald Dartmouth, curtly. "Say I shall be from town."

Then he turned on his heel, and humming his favourite opera air entered his own room, shutting the door after him and locking it.

The secretary likewise returned to his, but set the doorknob ajar a little way.

"Ready for a month hence," he mused, with his little white hand up at his brow. "What does that mean? Refuse the Duchess, refuse the invitation he has been fishing for? Will not be in town? This is a fresh move. Two days ago he had decided to remain in London for two months. Let me think, let me think. What can be his intentions? He is going away before a fortnight and intends returning to Dale in a month or so. Now, to discover where and why."

While he thus mused he heard Reginald Dartmouth's door open, and, listening, caught the sound of his footsteps passing into the library, a spacious apartment one floor lower.

"Gone to the library. He is studious to-day. Studious! not he. He has gone for some book of reference. If I could but find out which it might help me."

Presently the footstepes receded and Reginald Dartmouth's door was relocked.

Waiting a few minutes until he heard the wheels of the chair as it was drawn up to the table, the secretary taking a paper in his hand as if he wished to refer to some book for information concerning some matter in it, walked down to the library, and standing in the middle of the room looked carefully round upon the closely packed shelves.

It was a good-sized room, and well furnished with a capital selection of standard and popular works.

The secretary, as was only natural in so quiet and thoughtful a young gentleman, was fond of reading, at least so it was presumed, and he had taken charge of the library and its contents.

Only a few days back he had spent some hours in arranging the shelves, putting the backs of the books level and classifying them.

So thoroughly had he done it that on the completion of his task he had nodded with self-approval and asserted to himself that he should know if a volume had been taken down or misplaced.

That assertion he was now putting to proof.

Carefully and keenly he scrutinised each shelf, through poetry, the drama, history, medicine. No, no volume had been taken down, or if it had it had been so replaced that it was impossible to distinguish it.

Stop! There amongst the law volumes was one slightly projecting.

Very carefully he took it down and as carefully lit it fall open, thinking that the chances were greatly in favour of its opening at the page last read.

He was right, for stooping down and examining the leaves he discovered—what! No finger mark, no pencil jotting, not even a slip of folded paper as book-marker, but a few fragments of cigar ash.

In a moment he remembered that Reginald Dartmouth had struck a light, he had heard it in the next room—nay, more, there was the odour of a newly-lit cigar hanging about the library now.

That was the page.

With a fast-beating heart he ran his eyes over the headings of the paragraphs.

One caught his attention.

"Relating to the laws of marriage between Roman Catholic and Protestant subjects."

That was enough.

Replacing the volume, he returned to his own room.

"So," he murmured, "the Countess is a Roman Catholic; Reginald Dartmouth professes and disdains Protestantism. I see it all. He is going to marry her, and clandestinely too, or it would be announced. Good Heaven! if it be not stopped she will be sacrificed to him before a fortnight; for there is no doubt that the journey will be a runaway marriage. Well, she does not deserve it!" he murmured, with a scorn that was wondrously woman-like, "for a woman that would be cajoled by Reginald Dartmouth's fair speeches and false face would give her hand to the evil one were he dressed in broadcloth. But she must be saved. There is no time to lose; I must rouse Rebecca and her ally, Sir Charles, to their work!"

With that he sat down and penned a short note, signing himself "A Well-wisher."

"There is no time to lose. Search the well. If villainy can be unmasked H. D. may be found."

It was not the first anonymous note he had sent to the Warren after his chance discovery that Rebecca and Sir Charles were Reginald's foes. He had given them a wary hint that Hugh Darrell was still alive, thinking it would encourage them.

CHAPTER XLV.

It is rather startling to suddenly discover by an anonymous communication that a matter which you have been hugging to your heart for some time past with the most profound assurance of its being your own particular secret is no secret at all, or at least that another person shares it with you.

It is still more startling and embarrassing to be placed in the position of utter ignorance as to the identity of the unwelcome partner of your bosom mystery, and to be perpetually in a state of expectation and excitement thereto.

All this Rebecca experienced.

To say that she was astounded at the contents of John Stanfield's note is to employ but a weak word for her utter amazement.

Within half an hour after receiving the second, she had despatched a special messenger for Sir Charles Anderson, and during the lapse of the time necessary for his journey was in a state of ferment.

He arrived, cool and prepared as usual for anything that might turn up, but greatly wondering what had occurred and devoutly wishing that soon he should be allowed to have it out with Dartmouth after his own fashion.

Rebecca came out into the hall to meet him.

Sir Charles flushed a little and his eyes sparkled with something more than mere friendship as he almost sprang forward and clasped her hand.

"Well, Rebecca, here I am," he said, in his deep, manly tones. "You're looking well, awfully well."

Rebecca blushed again, and, dropping her hand very slowly, Sir Charles followed her into the dining-room.

She seated herself at one end of the large, old-fashioned couch, and made room for him beside her.

"You have not been long coming," she said, looking at him with a kindly light in her clear, pure eyes, "and you are looking quite well again, Charlie, quite well again."

"I'm quite right, Rebecca; now tell me what you want, and I am ready for it."

In half an hour he was sitting beside his cousin. But Rebecca obstinately refused to tell him anything until he had eaten; after luncheon they went into the garden, and seated in one of the small harbours secure from interruption, she, without a word of preface, placed the anonymous note before him.

Like Rebecca, Sir Charles stared at it, and as an addition stroked his moustache fiercely.

Then he looked up, and, meeting her eye, returned to the note again.

"Well," she said in a low voice, "what do you make of it, Charlie?"

"I—I don't know what to make of it" he replied. "You see the fellow doesn't sign his name. It is anonymous. Now, everybody says you ought to burn anonymous letters, and if ever you find the fellow who wrote them kick him. But this is very extraordinary! You told me that no one knew anything of the Dale affairs but yourself and me."

"That is it," responded Rebecca eagerly, "that is the mysterious part of it. I cannot conceive from whom this warning comes."

"The writing?"

Rebecca shook her head.

"It is so well disguised that it would be impossible to trace it. No, Charlie, trust me for thinking over every possible chance of a clue. There is not a single one. I cannot even conjecture from whom it came."

"Not Dartmouth himself?"

"No, he would be the last to write it, for fear of it being traced to him. Besides, he feels himself secure, depend upon it."

Sir Charles shook his head.

"If you can't find it out, Rebecca, how do you expect me to?"

But when Sir Charles read the second note, much to her astonishment, he sprang to his feet with a flush of delight.

"What?" asked Rebecca.

"By Jove. This fellow's a brick, whoever he is. He's got it. He's set me something to do. Search the well, he says. You can't think, Rebecca, he said, dropping into the seat again, "what a worry it has been to me to sit with my hands before me doing nothing—I should like to have gone in for Dartmouth, and wrung it out of him. But you said that was quite out of the question. Now there's some work for me. Give me a spade and a pickaxe, and I'll have that well out in half a dozen hours. Bravo! the fellow's hit it, whoever he is."

Rebecca coloured with pleasure, then laid her hand upon his arm timidly and turned pale.

"You are a good fellow, Charlie," she said, "and I am grateful. But we must go to work cautiously still. You think this anonymous adviser is a friend, and that he is giving us good advice; and so do I. But we must be very cautious, remembering with whom we have to deal.

Charlie, if you went down this minute with spade and pickaxe and discovered what there may be hidden in that well, went down alone and without witnesses, we should—or rather poor Hugh or Grace would—benefit nothing."

"Why not?" asked Sir Charles, rather afraid of this chance of his being balked.

Rebecca smiled sadly.

"Do you not guess what Reginald Dartmouth would say if we found what we expect—Harry

Darrell's genuine will? He would turn round and say that we had manufactured it and put it there ourselves."

"By Jove!" breathed Sir Charles. "You're right, Rebecca! But what a clever girl you are! Of course he would. But surely you don't mean to let the chance slip? You'll let me clear the well out somehow or other?"

"Yes," said Rebecca, "and soon. What we must do is to consult Mr. Reeves, the old lawyer, and get him to stand by with the doctor and some other influential person while the well is cleared, and then what we find there can be attested as genuine and without suspicion."

"That's it," said Sir Charles, springing up and pacing to and fro in the little arbour, with his eyes flashing eagerly. "That's it, Rebecca, and for Heaven's sake don't let us delay."

Rebecca held up her face—very pale but very firm it was.

"We will not," she said. "The time has come!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

As water to a traveller in the desert, as land to a shipwrecked mariner, was a short advertisement which appeared about this time in the *Morning Post* to Captain Dartmouth's secretary.

"Cecil—Landed safely. Staying at Royal Hotel, Strand. Come, or write—Laury."

John Stanfield left his employer's correspondence to its own fate that morning, and rushed out on his own business after reading that brief advertisement, and the young man, who presently appeared at the Royal Hotel, had neither red hair nor disfiguring blue spectacles, while his dull, mechanical expression had given place to one of the greatest excitement.

"Cecil!"

"Laury!"

It was in Laury Harman's private sitting-room that the two friends met again, so there were no witnesses to their emotion.

The tears stood in the lad's eyes—beautiful eyes they were too, now the hideous spectacles were removed.

Laury was visibly moved.

"I'm within my time," he said cheerfully. "I promised to come in a year, and it's barely ten months. I've not made my pile, Cecil, but I've a hundred or two that will start me in something here, and we won't be parted again, lad."

"Where have you been?" cried Cecil eagerly. "What have you been about?"

"I've been seeking diamonds, and I didn't find many. The Corner sold splendidly, and Mr. Stewart talks of coming home and buying a property in England. And, now, Cecil, tell me what you have been about!"

The lad smiled.

"I've been working for you, Laury."

"For me?"

"Do you remember telling me your name, and the name of your old home?"

Laury frowned.

"I only want to forget both."

"I've been there," said Cecil. "I've been at the Dale. I thought if I told the old Squire how brave you were, and all you'd done for me, he might send for you and be reconciled."

"A Darrell never forgives!" said Laury, slowly.

"Hush!" and the boy's voice took a grave key. "He's dead, Laury, poor old man! and his nephew, Reginald Dartmouth, has the property; but there are some who believe he got it by foul play."

"He was a villain," said Laury, "an out and out villain!"

"Well, Sir Charles Anderson and Miss Goodman think so too, and they are trying their best to unmask him. I have the honour to be his secretary, and I'm doing my best too. But, Laury, if once Captain Dartmouth hears that you, Hugh Darrell, are in England, he'll never rest till he gets you into his power."

"What a wonderfully clear head you have, lad," said Laury, admiringly; "and pray what would you advise me to do to keep my presence in the old country a secret?"

Cecil bent over him eagerly.

"I want you to promise me to stay here—to go nowhere, to see no one until I send you word. Sir Charles and Miss Goodman are on the road now, and it may be in a day or two, not more than a week at furthest, I shall hear of your success, and then you can go back to Dale in triumph—its lawful master."

Laury shook his head sadly.

"You are too hopeful, lad; I shall never see Dale again."

The lad clung to his arm with almost a woman's pertinacity.

"Promise me," he pleaded. "I only ask you to stay here quietly a few days—a week; it may give you back your old home, at most it can only take a little of your time. You don't know Reginald Dartmouth as I know him, Laury. If he could get you into his power he would murder you without a scruple, because he knows he is a usurper, and that you are the true heir of Dale."

Laury smiled half sadly.

"I can't refuse you, Cecil lad. I'll stay here, in durance vile, a week; but I've no faith in your brilliant schemes. I never hope to see Dale again."

Cecil's temporary master, Captain Dartmouth, like his secretary, was very busy that morning.

First and foremost he had to arrange for the Count's journey.

That matter cost him but little thought.

Forgery came easy to Reginald Dartmouth, and with all the materials to his hand, he speedily concocted a spurious despatch purporting to come from one of the leaders of the conspiracy in Italy demanding the Count's attendance in Rome, and having sent it he was now seated in his private room coolly and quietly waiting the result.

He had not to wait long.

"The Count Vitzarelli!" announced his new valet, and Reginald Dartmouth rose to meet him.

The Count was quietly triumphant and evidently running over with his news.

Reginald Dartmouth, watching him as the spider does the fly that is safely enmeshed in his woven snare, received him with his usual languid cordiality, and asked after the Countess.

"Lucille is well," replied the Count, "and desires me to bring you all loving greeting. But, Dartmouth, I have come to surprise you," and his sharp eyes trembled.

Reginald Dartmouth suppressed the mocking glitter of his deep eyes, and said,—

"Good tidings, I hope, my dear Count—nay, I see, for your face is an index of your news. Come," he added, with mock enthusiasm, "let me share your joy."

"What think you?" exclaimed the Count, waving the despatch. "Oh, Santa Maria, how fickle fortune is! The other day I was announcing Rome lost, to-day I am mad with the intelligence of her being nearly won."

Reginald grasped his hand with feigned delight.

"What?" he said. "Have we won, my dear Count? Is it possible?"

"Ay, ay, ay, ay," said the Count, his eyes running over with tears of joy. "Rome is nearly ours—at least so says this despatch, but read for yourself," and he pressed the forged despatch into the outstretched hand of its manufacturer.

Reginald Dartmouth read with an assumption of eagerness and emotion that would have deceived the evil one.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, suddenly, "they call you to Rome! You will go?"

"Of course, at once!" responded the Italian.

Reginald Dartmouth read on,—

"They enjoin you to secrecy—even in regard to the Society here in England—and Lucille!"

"Which secrecy I shall maintain!" said the Count, proudly. "Lucille is too faithful and dutiful to hesitate in obeying my commands, though I bid her accompany me to Rome and withhold the reason wherefore."

Again Reginald Dartmouth suppressed the mocking glitter.

(To be continued.)

THE RICH MISS SMITH.

(Continued from page 537.)

CHAPTER VI. AND LAST.

VERY soon after Mr. Ross returned to England Sir Norman Cheviot called on him and told him the story of that fatal picnic.

Miss Smith has been under my mother's care ever since; she is still dangerously ill. We have done our utmost for her; but if she dies I shall never forgive my relations for their cruel treachery. I think you may rest assured, apart from her illness, the events of that terrible night will have no ill-effects for your ward. My mother's position, and her well-known scrupulous sense of honour, would, I think, screen anyone under her care from the faintest breath of scandal."

"Poor child!" The old lawyer's eyes were not quite dry. "I never heard of anyone who seemed so unlucky. I'm fond of the girl, Sir Norman, but I sometimes think if she had died as a child it would have been a mercy. No fortune ever brought so much suffering as the one left to Olive."

Sir Norman looked bewildered.

"I cannot understand you. My mother and sister love Miss Smith dearly; she was a favourite with all our acquaintances. She is the first heiress I ever met who seemed to forget her wealth."

"Well, I'll tell you her story," said the old lawyer, and briefly he put the case before Sir Norman, concluding, "She never was a favourite at home and since she became an heiress her mother almost hates her. My poor client tied up his money so that Olive can't strip herself of any of it, or I believe she would long ago have gone shares with her brothers and sisters. She is more alone in the world than if she had been an orphan, and yet she has none of an orphan's independence."

"She is so pretty," said Norman, simply; "she is sure to marry young."

"I don't think she will marry at all. Oh, I don't mean I think she won't get over this illness; I mean that she is too much of a lady ever to marry a man who is not a gentleman, and I can't fancy a gentleman putting up with her relations."

"Do you think me a gentleman, Mr. Ross?" said Norman, with a sad, strange smile. "Well, I would marry Olive, and think the day that gave her to me the happiest of my life, if only I could win her love."

"You'd repent it," said Mr. Ross. "Her mother is the most disagreeable woman I ever met, and Olive's money would be nothing to you."

"Nothing. That's why I think sometimes I shall risk all and try my luck. At least she wouldn't think me a fortune-hunter."

"Well, you'd have my best wishes," said the old lawyer, drily. "Her riches have brought her little pleasure, poor child, and she's just the sort of girl to love with all her heart and soul if she ever loves at all. She talks of Girtton and science. But bless me, Sir Norman, she'd forget all that if Mr. Right came along."

Olive did not die. She was for many days in great danger; but at last she struggled back slowly from the gates of the dark valley; and when the autumn leaves were red and brown, and the air had the first chill sense of coming cold, they dressed her for the first time in a pretty, loose wrapper, and carried her to a sofa in Lady Maude's boudoir.

Lady Maude was still at Westbourne. She had taken the house on for another six weeks, and declared she was quite happy there. Neil was not with her; she had accepted her old playfellow, Jack Digby, and had gone home with his family on a long visit. Sir Norman came backwards and forwards, but as yet he had never seen Olive since that terrible September night.

She was very pretty, though the colour in her

cheeks was a fainter pink, and her hair had been cut off in the cruel fever, and now nestled in little curls on her head and brow. There was a strangely wistful smile on her face, and when Lady Maude had settled her on her pillows, and asked tenderly how she felt, her eyes filled with tears.

"I know it's ungrateful of me, but I can't help wishing I had died in the fever. I am so very tired, and no one wants me."

"You won't feel tired when you are stronger," said Lady Maude; "and I want you. Do you know, that child Helen wants to be married at Christmas, and I shall be as much alone as you are when she is gone."

"You will have Sir Norman."

"Norman is talking of going abroad, he seems to have a restless fit on. Olive, do you feel well enough to see him? he has been very anxious about you."

"I should like to see him very much, he was so kind, and I don't think he misjudged me that dreadful night."

"No one could do that, dear."

Presently when the short day was closing in, and only the winter fire-light lit up the room, someone came in and took a low chair by Olive's sofa; both of them had dreaded and yet longed for that first meeting, and now it had come about it was quite unlike what they had expected, for Norman forgot all else in his deep concern for the fragile altered look on Olive's face.

"Oh, child, child," he cried brokenly, "they have almost killed you amongst them."

"Oh, no; I am getting better very fast. Lady Maude says I should be quite well now, only I do not try."

"Why don't you try, Olive?"

"It is so lonesome," said the girl sadly. "I am quite alone in the world, no one wants me; I am only just the rich Miss Smith."

"I am very lonely, too," said Norman gently; "and, Olive, I love you with every fibre of my heart. Darling, could you forget the twelve long years between us and come to be the sunshine of my life?"

"It would be very wrong; I am not your equal."

"No, you are my superior. Olive, long years ago I loved and was deceived; I have never cared to look at a woman's face since till I met you at Deepdale Junction, and then my whole heart went out to you."

"And I thought you were like a knight of olden times," she answered.

"Mother," said Sir Norman, when Lady Maude came in to find Olive's head resting on his shoulder, "Olive and I are going to be married." "What a very wise proceeding," said Lady Maude, cheerfully. "But what will her guardians say?"

"Mr. Ross has given his approval, and says we may count on that of Mr. Jenkins. I mean to go to Brixton to-morrow and see Mr. and Mrs. Smith. I shall tell them that Olive has been very ill, and the doctors think she ought to spend the winter abroad, so we mean to have the wedding at once, that I may take her there."

"Are you willing to be disposed of so summarily, Olive?" asked Lady Maude tenderly.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith were astonished when they heard a real live baronet aspire to become their son-in-law; but the second part of Sir Norman's communication was very much to their taste. He said that as Olive could not alienate any portion of her fortune, and he thought it unjust there should be such a disparity between her means and her sisters, he proposed that one half of the sum usually settled as the jointure of the Ladies Cheviot should be made over to Mr. Smith absolutely to enjoy the income for his life, and the principal to be subsequently divided among his children."

"Olive is rich already," Norman said brightly, "she will not care for a large jointure; fifteen thousand pounds will make things easier for you now, Mr. Smith, and help to establish your children later."

There were no bridesmaids, no favors, no orange-blossoms and hardly any guests; it was the very quietest wedding ever known, but no one who saw the deep, joyous pride on Norman's face,

and the sweet, grave happiness on Olive's, could doubt that it was a love match pure and simple, though the groom was a wealthy baronet, and his bride—

THE RICH MISS SMITH.

THE END.

FACETIE.

ANOTHER proof that life is a conundrum is that everybody eventually gives it up.

PENK: "Was Smith's purpose of horse-whipping the editor carried out?" Quill: "No; but Smith was."

AH, MR. GRUMPSY, I HOPE I SEE YOU WELL." Grumpsey: "If you don't you had better consult an oculist."

FWEDDY: "Aw—Miss Ginevra, could you—aw—live in a flat?" Miss Ginevra: "Yes, but not with one."

"HE offered her his hand and fortune." "Did she accept?" "No, the first was too large and the second too small."

I'VE half a mind to write poetry for the magazines." "All right. Half a mind seems to be about enough for that sort of thing."

SHE: "What is the height of your ambition, Jack?" He (admiringly): "About five feet seven inches."

TOM: "I wonder why Nettie Gaye screamed so loud when I kissed her. Extreme modesty?" Dick: "No. Force of habit."

CLERK: "The gent in No. 116 says the rain leaked down on his bed last night and soaked him to the skin." Proprietor: "Charge one bath (half-a-crown) in his bill."

HE: "You are the most beautiful woman." She: "You are trying to flatter me." "But, indeed, it is true." "Oh, I know it is true, but I doubted whether you really meant it."

"MY good man," inquired the tender-hearted old lady, "are you in any trouble? Why do you stand there wringing your hands?" "Cause," replied the tramp, "I just washed 'em."

TEACHER: "Who helped you with this essay, James?" Pupil: "Nobody, sir." Teacher: "Now tell me the truth. Did not your brother?" Pupil: "No, sir; he did it all himself."

BRIGGS: "I borrowed a cigar from you yesterday, and I want to return it." Briggs: "You don't mean to return it. You mean to replace it, don't you?" Briggs: "Not much! It's the same cigar."

THEY were looking at a marble bust. "Who's that a head of?" asked the young man. The young woman studied a moment. "It's ahead of us," she said with a small chuckle, and they passed on.

SHE (sympathisingly): "I feel so sorry for the poor tramcar conductors. It must be terrible for them to have to be on their feet all day long." He: "Humph! They ain't. They're on the passengers' feet more'n half the time."

COUNSEL FOR PLAINTIFF: "What reasons can you give for thinking that this lady did not intend to hit her husband when she threw the sugar-basin at him?" Witness: "Well, she did hit him."

HIS MOTHER: "What are you moping about the house for, Tommy? Why don't you go over and play with Charley Pinafore?" Tommy: "Cause I played with Charley yesterday, and I don't s'pose he's well enough yet."

"How are you getting on with your music lessons?" asked the visitor. "Very peacefully now," replied the resolute girl. "What do you mean?" "The neighbours on both sides of us have moved."

Mrs. SLINGSBY (to David, who has narrowly missed a wicked-looking Arab): "You bad boy! I'll teach you to throw stones at people!" David: "All right; let's see you try to hit that man with the sideboards in front of the theatre."

DESPERATION.—Mrs. Youngwife (indignantly): "And you took the cake I put in the window to cool, and ate it! How dared you!" Dusty Phoebe (caught in the act, and consequently humble): "A starving man will eat almost anything, mum."

SAID Willie Twickenham (who had been admitted for a few moments to his mother's afternoon tea): "I've just thought of a lovely conundrum. Why is all the silver here to day like our new man?" "Oh, why, Willie?" "Cause they're both hired."

I ALWAYS suspected that cashier," said a member of the board of directors. "Maybe he'll turn up," said another; "you can't always judge a man by his appearance!" "No; but in a case like this it is pretty safe to judge him by his disappearance."

IN a northern town. Stranger to native: "I saw a policeman coming out of a public-house at half-past twelve last night." N. (proudly): "Glorious! Before the great temperance wave flowed over this city he would not have come out until morning."

JACK: "I heard that that girl you have been going to see so long is to be married next month." Tom (sadly): "It's true, she is." Jack: "That's pretty tough on you, isn't it?" Tom (re-signedly): "I guess I can stand it." Jack: "Who is the happy man?" Tom: "I am."

"It's too bad; the editor sent my beautiful and pathetic story back without reading it," said the ambitious maiden. "Dearie me! how do you know it?" asked the fond mother. "I've looked through every page, and there isn't a tear-drop anywhere."

MRS. RUSHER: "Has Mr. Goldcoin, with whom you have been dancing all the evening, at last declared his intentions, Mabel?" Mabel: "Yes, mother." Mrs. Rusher: "I am so glad! And what did he say?" Mabel: "He declared he would never marry."

THE following doubtful compliment is a fragment from a love letter: "How I wish, my darling Adelaide, my engagements would permit me to leave town and come and see you! It would be like visiting some old ruin, hallowed by time and fraught with a thousand recollections."

TEACHER: "Arthur, I shall be obliged to detain you again to-day after school is out." Arthur (aged 7): "Of course you understand that if there is any gossip comes of your keeping me after school every day you are responsible for it. It is none of my seeking."

MOTHER: "Do you mean to tell me that your husband is out half the time until after midnight?" Daughter: "More than half." "And you never scold?" "Never." "I am amazed." "You forget that my husband is a poet." "What of that, pray?" "When he comes home early, he always insists on reading his poems to me."

A PORTER was engaged in clearing a luggage van, when the door swung round, striking him violently on the head. "Oh, Pat," he exclaimed to an Irishman standing on the platform, "I believe I have opened my head." "Bedad, and now's the time to put something in it," was the witty reply of Pat.

"I was very much shocked," said that cheerful lunatic Snodgrass, meeting Tupman in the street, "when I saw Winkle this morning. He looked ten years older than when I saw him last!" "When did you see him last?" "Winkle? Oh, I suppose it must be about fifteen years since I saw Winkle last."

"It is easier," the curate read, "for a needle to go through the eye of the camel." He saw the vicar's stony stare fixed on him, and realised that he was making a mistake. He blushed, coughed slightly, and corrected himself: "It is easier for a camel to go through the knee of an idol." Then he went on quite happily.

"COL. BAOWN," remarked a chappie, "is the finest after-dinner speaker I know of." "Why?" said his friend, in some astonishment, "I never heard he had any ability in that direction at all." "Well, he has; I've dined with him several times at various places and after dinner he always says: 'That's all right, my boy, I'll pay for it.'

SOCIETY.

THE Empress of Germany will not be present at the Royal wedding at Coburg.

THE Queen is expected to arrive at Coburg about the 16th, and will reside during her stay at the Hofgarten Palace.

THE Prince of Wales is a very short sleeper. Even when very late to bed—and he rarely retires before two a.m.—he is always down by eight o'clock.

THE Emperor of Russia has determined, in accordance with medical advice, to move the royal residence to Kieff, the palace in St. Petersburg being declared insanitary.

A GRAND portrait of the Empress Frederick has been presented by Her Imperial Majesty to the Royal Hospital for Diseases of the Chest in the City-road, London.

ALL the Court fêtes in Russia have been postponed until after Easter, when the marriage of the Grand Duchess Xenia will be made the occasion of divers balls and festivities at the Russian capital.

THE Duke of York has announced his intention of going to Newcastle during the first week in April, to comply with the request made to his Royal Highness that he should open the Rutherford College there.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales are to be the guests of Lord Penrhyn at Penrhyn Castle during the first week in July, when it is their Royal Highness's intention to be present at the National Eisteddfod at Carnarvon.

PRINCESS ALICE of Hesse will probably go to Florence with the Queen, and only leave her Majesty a week or ten days in advance of her brother's wedding, which is now fixed to take place about the 20th of April at the Palace of Coburg.

THE Duke of Augustenburg is the only brother of the German Empress, and if he dies without leaving a son (he is unmarried) his title and his large estates in Silesia and Holstein would pass to his uncle, Prince Christian.

PRINCESS CHRISTIAN is to spend Easter week at Oxford, in order that she may attend the National Union of Teachers' Conference, which is to assemble on Easter Monday. The Princess and her daughter, Princess Victoria, will probably be the guests of the Dean of Christ Church and Mrs. Paget.

THE Sultan of Turkey has a remarkable fondness for collecting carriages. He is almost a monomaniac on the subject, and his collection of vehicles comprises over five hundred, and is, as may readily be accepted, the largest and finest in Europe.

THE Queen has presented a pair of beautiful and costly silver kettledrums to the regiment of Prussian Dragoons of which her Majesty is the honorary colonel. The Emperor William will be present at the ceremony of delivering over the Queen's gift to the regiment, a detachment of which is to be sent to Coburg in April to be in attendance on her Majesty during her stay in Germany.

PRINCESS JOSEPHINE OF FLANDERS, whose engagement to Prince Charles of Hohenzollern was lately announced, is charming and amiable, a clever pianist, and a young lady of pronounced literary tastes. The engagement is one of pure affection, for the cousins have been sweethearts from childhood, and it was only the objection to the match on the score of kinship, raised by some of the friends, which stood for a moment in the way of the alliance. Princess Josephine is the younger of the two daughters of the Count and Countess of Flanders, and a niece of King Leopold of Belgium. The fiancé Prince Charles, is five-and-twenty, tall, fair, and good-looking, and is the third son of the reigning Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, and a brother of Ferdinand, Crown Prince of Roumania. King Leopold is entirely in favour of the match, and has conferred upon Prince Charles the Grand Cordon of the Leopold Order.

STATISTICS.

THE bones and muscles of the human body are capable of over 1,200 different movements.

THE total value of the war material of the French Army amounts to nearly £125,000,000.

THERE are at present at British railway stations nearly 3,000 automatic machines, the entire rental for the space they occupy amounting last year to £7,244. For the same year 151½ tons, in 6,794,810 packets of chocolate, and 5,127,594 packets of sweets, weighing 151 tons, were sold.

CABDRIVING seems to be conducive to longevity. According to the last report of Sir Edward Bradford, it appears that no fewer than 917 cab drivers are between 60 and 70 years of age, 157 between 70 and 80, while one venerable patriarch, who is going on 90, still holds a license. There are also 118 omnibus drivers over 60, and of these 18 are over 70. London contains 15,011 cab-drivers and 6,517 omnibus and tramcar drivers.

GEMS.

YOU traverse the world in pursuit of happiness, which is within the reach of every man; a contented mind confers it all.

IT is astonishing how soon the whole conscience begins to unravel if a single stitch drops; one little sin indulged makes a hole you could put your head through.

THE least and most imperceptible impressions received in our infancy have consequences very important and of long duration. It is with these first impressions as with a river, whose waters we can easily turn at its source; with the same facility we may turn the minds of children to what direction we please.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ORANGE OMELET.—Seed an orange and remove all the inside skin, so that there is nothing but the pulp remaining. Sweeten rather liberally, and when you are ready to fold your omelet, lay the orange pulp inside, and serve immediately.

SCALDED SCONES.—Put three quarters of a pound of flour into a basin and add a pinch of salt; put a teacupful of milk into a small pan and a good teaspoonful of butter; boil it, and then stir it in among the flour till the flour is all wet, but not slopy; cover over with a paste; now take a large spoonful of flour, knead it out, and roll it into a thin scone; cut in four, and put on the griddle on both sides.

MACARONI AND CHEESE.—Quarter pound of macaroni and quarter pound cheese; break the macaroni in short pieces, and put it into plenty of boiling water with a little salt, to boil two minutes; then drain it and put in one and a quarter breakfast cups of milk and let it boil slowly ten minutes longer; take it from the fire and stir in half of the cheese grated; salt and pepper to season it, and a little mustard; pour it out on an ashet, and sprinkle over it the other half of the grated cheese; put it down before the fire to brown the top.

SPICE CAKE.—Three quarters of a pound of flour, half pound raisins, half pound currants, quarter pound orange peel, quarter pound butter, quarter pound sugar, one and a half large teaspoonsful of mixed spice, two eggs, one teaspoonful baking powder, three quarters of a teacupful of milk; put the flour and butter in a basin and rub them together till they are quite mixed, then add the spice and baking powder and the sugar; when well mixed add the fruit which should be picked and washed, the orange peel cut up; beat up the eggs well and stir them in, and then the milk; when well mixed pour into prepared tin, and put in the oven till ready about one hour.

MISCELLANEOUS.

FINGER-PRINTS as a means of identification have been adopted in the Indian Army.

IN Egypt cakes containing chopped vegetables are a favourite food.

DANISH lighthouses are supplied with oil to pump on the waves in case of a storm.

ARTIFICIAL agates are now made by so many different and effective processes that the stone has lost much of its value as a gem.

THE Grand Duchess Xenia is almost as devoted to dancing as her mother, whom she closely resembles.

THE reading of romances is forbidden by the Koran; hence popular tales are never put in writing among Mohammedans, but are passed from one story-teller to another.

A UNIQUER boat has been constructed at Christianstadt. She is built with six wheels supporting the sides, so that she can run on the rails which join the two lakes on which she plies, and the engine-power can be transferred from the screw to the wheels.

EARTHENWARE sleepers, the invention of a Japanese, were recently experimented on at Shimabashi Station, Japan. Fairly good results were obtained. It is claimed that the increased cost of earthenware sleepers is amply compensated by their freedom from decay.

MR. GLADSTONE was born in the year of great babies—1809. Among the other great personages who were born in 1809 were Darwin, Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett, Browning, Edgar A. Poe, the historian Kinglake, Mendelssohn, Jules Favre, President Lincoln, and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

LIVE rattlesnakes are sold for a dollar apiece by peddlars in the streets of Southern California, towns. Buyers are found among persons who want to tan the hides for various uses, and each buyer kills his snakes in the manner that he regards most conducive to the preservation of the skins' colours.

OCEAN waves have on a number of occasions dashed over the tops of lighthouses which are 150 feet high. As a wave in the open ocean is accompanied by a depression as deep as the wave is high, a ship in the trough of the sea encountering such waves would be banked by hills of water, if the term may be used, 300 feet high.

A FORM of sport very popular in Normandy is that of flying kites, which are, some of them, of very large dimensions. There has been a competition recently at Rouen, on the heights of St. Catharine. The victorious kite rose to the height of 8,500 feet, and would have soared higher but for lack of string.

THE jewels of the crown of the King of Portugal are valued at 35,000,000 francs, and his diamonds weigh 5,000 carats, their value being estimated at more than £2,000,000. Among them is a diamond reported to weigh 1680 carats, which, if genuine, is perhaps the largest stone of the kind in the world. It is, however, suspected of being a white topaz, and the King will not allow a critical examination to be made of it.

THE main and hair springs of watches are made of steel first drawn into wire. A pound of crude iron costs one halfpenny; it is converted into steel; that steel is made into watch-springs, each one of which is sold for half-a-guinea, and weighs but the tenth part of a grain. After deducting for waste, there are 7,000 grains to a pound; it, therefore, affords steel for 70,000 watch-springs, the value of which, at half-a-guinea each, amounts to 35,000 guineas.

It has been supposed that the waters of the Dead Sea are absolutely destitute of any living vegetable or animal organism. A French investigator has found that this is wrong. He finds in vast numbers of species of micro-organisms, and they are of a very malevolent character. Animals inoculated die in a few days from the blood-poisoning brought on through the agency of these minute bodies. The river Jordan, which is so popular with pilgrims for bathing, is said to be full of these micro-organisms.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BEVAN.—February 15th, 1894, fell on Sunday.

CORNER.—It is a trade, not a household matter.

CURIOSITY.—Rags are sent to paper mills usually.

W. S.—Three weeks notice is required in any case.

ANONYMOUS.—We do not advise upon such questions.

ARROW.—The Derby course is one and a half miles in length.

INQUIRIES.—Newspaper advertisements date from 1652.

HONEST.—A life sentence means precisely twenty years.

A CONSTANT READER.—You had better leave matters alone.

HORACE.—The hours of work do not appear unduly long.

EVAN EVANS.—February 11th, 1894, fell on Wednesday.

JONNIE.—Sixty-five to seventy is maximum room temperature.

IGNORANT MAIDEN.—The accent on the second syllable.

WORKMAN.—The only course is to give notice and leave.

M. S. J.—Any medical man will show you how to do it.

WALTER.—She cannot prevent you from having free use of your own house.

G. B. D.—Cats, as a rule, attain their full growth in one year.

MELFORT.—A clear week from the date of notice, if the tenancy was weekly.

LONDONER.—The almanac date for beginning of spring, is March 20th.

M. H.—For information as to conditions, see the University Calendar.

FLAGELLUM LILY.—We should say change of scene, certainly of climate, is the only cure.

DICK.—He has published several works we believe. Consult your bookseller.

B. Y.—The ranks of the corps are open only to men who have been in the army.

JACKO.—Debts due by a person under twenty-one cannot be recovered from him.

ADMIRING READER.—Cochineal is generally used. If properly done the marks are indelible.

DOLLY.—We know of nothing to recommend. It depends very much on the material.

HAROLD MERVYN.—M. B. means bachelor of medicine; B. Ch. means bachelor of surgery (Dublin).

PAINSTAKING PHIL.—Read the standard literature of the age, and practice composition every day.

FRANCIS.—We must leave you to work out the calculations yourself. They are simple enough.

J. S. G.—Tax must be paid on income earned abroad but sent into or received in this country.

READER WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—No one, so far as we know, can tell the precise number of Stradivarii violin in existence. (2) About the same we think.

HADDINGTON.—H.M.S. *Eurydice* went down, with all on board, off Dunnose Headland, near Ventnor, Isle of Wight, March 24th, 1878.

T. B.—We know of no recruiting station for the United States Army or Navy in England. This would be hardly allowable.

WILD ROSE.—The letters R. S. V. P. stand for the French words "Repondez s'il vous plait," meaning that a reply is requested.

UNHAPPY WIFE.—The wife can obtain a divorce on the ground of adultery and cruelty, but she cannot marry again until she has obtained a divorce.

DAVID.—During the period for which the patent is granted, no one but the inventor and his assigns have a right to manufacture and sell the patented article.

P. L. S.—Only members of the brotherhood, belonging to that or some other lodge, can be present at such meetings; members of public are not admitted.

PHYLLO.—Fuchsias should be pruned and repotted in February in order to be in good condition in July, when they can be planted out of doors.

CHARLIE JONES.—Flogging was abolished in the army April, 1881; it was modified in the navy in March, 1881, and since still further reduced.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—The accident, not being in any way due to the employer, he is not liable to make compensation.

HOUSESKEEPER.—Dust well with a soft camel's hair brush, and then go over it carefully with a clean camel's hair brush dipped from time to time in warm spirits of wine.

EDGAR C.—Charles II. as Rowley, William III. as Dutch William, George I. as the Hanoverian Rat, George III. as Farmer George, George IV. as the First Gentleman, and William IV. as the Sailor King.

M. H. J.—Give it a good coat of strong gum mixed with ink underneath, and dry at the fire; that is a simple remedy.

FRANK.—The exports are chiefly wool, gold, silver, tin, timber, fruit and jam, hops, grain, hides, skin, and bark.

SONGSTRESS.—Practise scales daily, and immediately on rising, as well as before every meal, gargle throat freely with cold water.

ONE OF A FAMILY.—All that the deceased possessed at death falls to be divided equally between her brothers and sisters, none having a preference.

AILLA.—The woman can legally marry at any time in Scotland after twelve years of age without either parents' or trustees' consent.

FATHER.—A father can take his son into partnership as soon as he likes; the fact that the son does carry on business is sufficient to show that he can do so.

A REGULAR READER.—We should require to know something more than you tell us before stating a definite opinion regarding the possibility of a successful action for breach after two and a half years interval.

HARRY.—It is said that "*Keop's Fables*," published in England in 1814, was the first book printed with numbered pages. William Caxton, the first English printer, issued the work.

E. D. C.—A man must be C. M., Master of Chirurgery (or Surgery), before he can practice; he may also, but not necessarily, be M. B.; he must be in practice for two years before he can obtain M. D.

ELEANOR.—Alternate scrubbing with a strong solution of washing soda in hot water greatly assists the process, but it is of no avail to use the glass-paper until the wood has dried after each scrubbing.

DOROTHY.—Go over the paper with a brush and clean water, leave it soaking, and two hours later it may be taken off in sheets; give walls a coat of whitewash afterwards; paint yields to naphtha and caustic potash.

LOVE SILLY TAPPED AT MY HEART.

LOVE SILLY tapped at my heart, one day,
When all was bright and fair;
I had dreamed of a face whose beauty and grace
Haunted me everywhere.

Oh, fondly I dreamed of an angel, it seemed
Too fair on this earth to abide!

When Love found a way to my bosom one day,

The maiden was there at his side.

My heart was lost in a sweet, dreamy thrill;
Contented, I asked for no more;

Oh, blist, happy day when Love found the way
And tapped at my heart's chamber door!

Oh south wind carest each shimmering tress!

Beard neare, O skies of blue!

Low bow your head, O rose wondrous red,

She's lovelier far than you.

W. W.

JEFFERY.—Colorado enjoys a high reputation for its general freedom from cold weather. Little snow falls even in winter except upon the mountains. The rainfall is also comparatively small.

W. S. S.—The song commencing
"Who is Sylvia? What is she,
That all our swains commend her?"

is in Shakespeare's "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Act IV., scene 2.

SWEET SIXTEEN.—Blackheads are not a disease in themselves, but a symptom of disorder existing elsewhere in the system; the digestive arrangements are impaired, liver or kidneys may be a little out of order.

D. H. W.—They are probably washed in too hot water, which is fatal to them. They must be washed with curd soap in lukewarm water, then thoroughly rinsed, well wrung out, rolled in a clean cloth, and ironed till they are dry.

AN OLD READER.—Germany has the largest available army, thoroughly equipped and organised for war, but Russia has most men, on paper, her forces foot up to two-and-a-half millions; she could not put half of that number in the field and keep them there.

BUSY HOUSEWIFE.—It may not be advisable to do anything lest you should spoil the tone, but you might get half-a-gill of pure copal varnish, put a drop into all holes off the end of a darning-needle, then when that has dried, give the whole a slight coat of the varnish.

ALICIA.—Apply to the clergyman of the parish, or the Superintendent Registrar of the district. Banish of marriage must be put up on three successive Sundays; a term of residence is necessary both for marriage in church and at a registrar's office.

S. Q.—No licence is needed by the man who deals in second-hand books, boots, or hats; he can buy and sell wherever he finds it convenient; law recognises that there is not enough money in these things to make it worth the while of anyone to steal them for the purpose of selling to resellers.

WORRIED ON.—Your good sense should have told you that the salary stated would be insufficient to maintain a home of any pretensions, unless conducted with the most rigid economy. The wonder is that you get along at all when so much of your allowance goes toward paying the rent for which you are responsible.

AN OLD HEADIN.—I. It is against our rule to give trade addresses, and even if we did the address we might give you would be so far away that it would not be worth your while to send the article in question, as the cost of carriage, added to the amount of the cleaning, would equal what you could get a new hat for. 2. We will answer next week if possible.

K. C.—You might have prevented them getting hard by using water merely warm, never hot or never cold, and avoiding all washing powders, and never scrubbing them with strong alkaline soap. They should be washed by moving them through a lather without rubbing. Once you have let them harden you can do little to improve them.

E. S.—The rust may be removed, if not too long standing, with very fine emery powder made into a paste, with vaseline or paraffin oil. The vaseline is preferable, as there is no objectionable smell. After well rubbing this into the steel, apply oxide of tin (putty powder) and oil and rub off with a soft rag. The dry powder may also be used with a scratch brush.

WILFRED.—If the young lady to whom you refer is really attached to you, it will need no persuasion on your part to do any contemplated marriage. She is young and will be better fitted to become your wife many years hence. If she be not willing to wait until your financial prospects shall be more encouraging, she is not worthy of the love you have bestowed upon her.

SIR BOY.—You could not do better than learn to dance, as you suggest; you will in doing so be constantly brought into contact with females under circumstances which are not favourable to sustained conversation yet afford opportunity for interchange of ordinary courtesies and small talk; you will note what others say and do, and copy the manners of those who seem to be most easy and successful in their approaches to the other.

PAT.—St. Patrick's birthplace is not accurately known, but it is pretty generally conceded that he first saw the light at Kilpatrick, being the son of an officer in the Roman army stationed there, who subsequently removed to England with the Imperial forces; there St. Patrick was captured by a band of piratical Irish who carried him off to Armagh, whence in time he escaped to England again, then went to Gaul, perhaps to Rome, and subsequently returned to Ireland to convert the natives to Christianity.

JULIAN TRESILLIAN.—Reporters have no hours; they can rarely count on being free before midnight, and are expected to turn up for duty next morning at eleven o'clock; indeed, it will occasionally happen that they are detained till two o'clock in office and have to catch a train at seven o'clock (five hours later) for some distant meeting; the only compensation for their excessive labour is got in summer time, when there may often be a week at a time with little to do; the work is unquestionably trying to constitution.

ELLEN.—Take the piece of crapes and hold it out flat (not stretched tight) over a steaming copper or bowl of water. When it is steamed moist all over, roll it on to a round stick, such as a broom handle, taking care to lay it quite smooth, while not straining the figure. Then put the crapes rolled thus into a warm room or near the fire, and let it be for some hours till it feels crisp and dry. When the crapes is in very small pieces the drying will be more easily done by pinning it out on cardboard by rolling it on a stick.

MOTHER'S HELP.—Take four breakfast cups of milk, two tablespoonsful corn flour, half pound sugar, one teaspoonful essence of vanilla; heat the milk and add to it the corn flour wet with a little cold milk; let it boil, then stir in the sugar and the vanilla and set it aside to get quite cold, then freeze it. Any other flavour may be added instead of vanilla; lemon or strawberry, or a tablespoonful of chocolate may be boiled with the corn flour and is good for a change. The cream may be made with skim milk and an egg put in well beaten up; after it has boiled that makes it a little yellow.

T. C.—In the modern acceptation of the word, harem merely means the private apartments of women. The end of the Turkish railway carriage, curtained off from the rest, is harem; so is the ladies' cabin on board ship, and the latticed gallery in a mosque. In the dwelling-house it is all that quarter inhabited by the wife and children and other ladies of the family. Few Turks nowadays have more than one wife. The traditional Turk with his innumerable woman no longer exists, except as a very rare exception; but the Mussulman has not sacrificed the advantages of the privacy granted him by the Mahomedan law and custom.

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